

Midori and Özgür Aydin: an introspective evening in Oberlin (Mar. 5)

by Stephanie Manning



If one word encapsulated Midori’s recital at Oberlin on March 5, it might be “catharsis.” This program wasn’t just a distraction from the big emotions many of us have been grappling with these days. It required confronting tangled feelings first, before arriving with a changed attitude on the other side.

Finney Chapel was the violinist’s first stop on her latest recital tour, together with her longtime collaborator, pianist Özgür Aydin. The Oberlin Artist Recital Series event attracted a large crowd, yet the space still seemed fitting for an intimate, two-person recital. Low lighting shrouded the Chapel’s great organ and the back of the stage in a warm darkness, focusing all attention on the musicians.

The process of catharsis came slightly out of order, but nonetheless effectively. For embracing a thorny emotional tangle head-on, there was Francis Poulenc’s *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, which arrived after intermission. The dense and prickly sections of the first and third movements suited Midori’s often fiery way of attacking notes, while the lush moments and descending waterfalls of notes paired well with Aydin’s gentler sensibilities.

The two musicians remained intrinsically in sync all evening, both in big-picture musicality and more granular timing. The middle “Intermezzo,” calming and less angular than the characteristically-Poulenc outer movements, received especially beautiful treatment, down to the coordination of the final moment: a short violin glissando ending with a gentle piano plink.

A balcony window squeaked intermittently with the wind, occasionally interrupting quieter moments, like the second-movement “Langsam” of Robert Schumann’s *Fünf Stücke im Volkston* (“Five Pieces in Folk Style”). Midori’s pointed changes in mood and

dynamics during the opening “Vanitas vanitatum” sometimes felt a bit abrupt, but she met the fourth and fifth movements with a healthy sense of energy and enthusiasm.

Johannes Brahms’ *Sonata No. 1 in G* gave Aydin more room to blossom, and his glassy, twinkling presence soon became the primary melody. For Midori, some dubious intonation arose in the second movement’s long, languid passages of double stops. But both musicians relaxed into the finale, and a peaceful quiet descended on the audience amid the lulling melodies, as if a calming mist was slowly drifting down from above.

The listeners themselves — many of them music students or educators — responded all evening with a charmingly-Oberlin blend of enthusiasm and traditionalism, cheering happily between pieces while also quickly muffling any clapping between movements. The loudest cheers went up after the celebratory end to *Tzigane*, Maurice Ravel’s classic showpiece, where Midori set aside the sheet music and let joyful muscle memory take over.



Ravel, whose 150th anniversary was celebrated on March 7, appeared twice on the program. In Lucien Garban’s arrangement of “Kaddish” from *Deux mélodies hébraïques*, the violin’s haunting melody spoke to pain and beauty in equal measure — even without the words of the original vocal part.

Midori and Aydin returned to arrangements of vocal music with the program’s encore, Pauline Viardot’s charming *Häi luli*. The duo easily expressed the piece’s longing, passion, and sorrow — no words necessary.

Photos by Mike Crupi

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