

Ashley Bathgate, who was born in Saratoga Springs, NY, in 1985, made her official NY debut on February 9th at Weill Hall (she began her cello studies at age 12 and as a recitalist she has previously appeared at the Saratoga Music Festival, Barge Music, and at the Pleshakov Music Center. She has also been invited frequently to perform as a featured soloist with the Lake Placid Sinfonietta, the Woodstock Chamber Orchestra and in performances of the d'Albert and Barber Cello Concerto's with Leon Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra. With such extensive experiences, as a chamber music devotee, a champion of contemporary music, as well as having been shaped by two of the most illustrious virtuoso cello pedagogues, Luis Garcia Renart and Aldo Parisot, this demure (or demure-looking) young lady evidently has had quite a past. But, jokes aside the brilliant high level and accomplishment of her playing and music making at this concert left no doubt that young Ms. Bathgate has an even bigger future ahead of her!

With the formidable key board support of Todd Crow, the evening commenced with Beethoven's Sonata No. 4 in C Major, Op. 102, No. 1. This rather cryptic Sonata, the shortest of Beethoven's canonical five, was purged of it's dour seriousness and, from the first phrases became gratifying, airborne and unpretentious. The ensuing Allegro vivace (of this quasi-church sonata) leapt to life with a scampering, unusually mercurial quality that suggested a playful scherzando that this listener found absolutely refreshing. The balance of the composition continued in this Sonata's silly (for Beethoven) end.

Donald Martino (1931-2005) wrote his Parisonatina al'Dodecafonica in 1964 for Aldo Parisot (as its name would suggest). As the program tells us, the unaccompanied work shows a restless preference in exploring notes in a twelve tone system. It also consistently approaches the structure and cellistic technique in an imaginative way... It was written in four movements (actually conceived in two parts of a two movement context). I vividly remember Parisot's own performance in Tanglewood that elicited from Harold Schonberg a rave review to the effect that no other living cellist could muster the work's inhumanly daunting technical demands. Time marches on and several Parisot students have successfully attempted to master its difficulties. Ms. Bathgate triumphantly tamed the beast with almost scary insolent ease: She not only went through all its fiendish obstacles-- extremes of pitch, texture, drumming on the wood of the instrument, exotic variations of color and the like--she managed, as Parisot once did, to evoke poetry and lyricism and made real music from these acrobatics. This was the high point of this recital.

Debussy's Sonata in D Minor, vintage 1915, the first of a projected series of six Sonatas that the terminally ill Debussy didn't live to compose (he died of cancer in 1918 after finishing only three). Debussy's subtitle "Pierrot fache avec la lune" (Pierrot angry at the moon), as the annotation tells us, "captures the spirit of the Italian" comedia dell'arte" and the usage of pantomime; minimum gesture producing maximum effect. Using impressionistic techniques for variety, he colors the music using pizzicato, tremolo, ponticello, harmonics and trills. His appreciation of the traditional dance rhythms and colorful melodies of Spain is very evident in this composition. Ms. Bathgate's mercurial account was beautifully right on the mark. Mr. Crow's clairvoyant support was equally witty accurate.

The Brahms Sonata in F Major, Op. 99 made similarly light of all its notorious obstacles (the treacherous, and also often missed, high note near the beginning of the Allegro vivace first movement was securely dead centre both times (the repeat was observed). I also liked the player's strong, solid rhythm in the Adagio affetuoso, and particularly that they resisted the all too frequent habit of rushing the tempo of the pizzicatos when the movement's recapitulation is approached. If I have a quibble (really half a quibble), sometimes the precipitation in the third and fourth movements sometimes whirled by and made the music sound too easy. I would have liked more gravitas in this hirsute, heroic masterpiece. But I must admit that both players, Ms. Bathgate and Mr. Crow, seemed to be in perfect accord.

For an encore, we heard the Paganini/Luigi Silva arrangement of a Theme and Variations from the opera "Moses". As in the already sighted Martino, Ms. Bathgate had great fun with its difficulties.