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Israeli cellist plays a polished concert of all-new works

*By David Patrick Stearns
Inquirer Music Critic*

Those who monitor the cutting edge are used to parsing ideas that aren't fully realized, presented in jerry-built apparatuses and with execution so sketchy that there's an air of "you know what I mean." It's to be expected in a culture where innovation is considered suspicious, creating steep obstacles for artists attempting to get their work before the public.

What's not expected is the likes of Israeli cellist Maya Beiser. Presented by the Kimmel Center's Fresh Ink series Thursday, she played a concert of all-new music for solo cello, multitrack tape and video with the kind of polish that allows clarity of intent and freedom in performance. So it can be done - and with rock-star magnetism and only a little artistic pretension. It was an important night.

Beiser presented nothing so severe as the adventurous unaccompanied cello programs for which Matt Haimovitz is known. Most of her works were written for her, with the multitrack tape element creating, if nothing else, a lush sound environment.

With that sensual element consistently present, the concert was anything but difficult for the audience. Since she uses amplification, it's hard to tell how good a cellist she is, though she projects a bright, forthright sound with a sturdy sense of line afforded by sparing use of vibrato. A veteran of New York's laudably extreme Bang on a Can modern music festival, she has fine taste in composers: Osvaldo Golijov, David Lang and Steve Reich.

Golijov's Mariel is a lament for a friend killed in a car accident, and with its soaring melodies and downward sweeping melodic lines, the piece's solo cello writing alone would be compelling. The tape added underlying rhythmic nervousness and a dark, amber tinge.

Reich has written numerous "counterpoint" works, but Cello Counterpoint's seven cello voices interweave with none of the dryness that has afflicted some of its predecessors. In fact, the piece's thematic transformation is so inventive and organic that it easily takes its place among Reich's best.

Lang's World to Come seemed to be about inducing delirium, both painful (with its exhaustive, water-torture-style repetition) and rapturous when subsidiary musical elements created a hypnotic power. The one piece written for cello alone was Four Strings by Cambodian composer Chinary Ung, a rage-filled statement lying somewhere between a soliloquy and a screed regarding the rape of his country.

Anytime a performer appears amid so much technology, the human-heat element can be lost. But that's not possible with someone of Beiser's commitment. Also, her live presence gives a clear-cut foreground element to each piece that keeps details from being lost in an electronic soup. That explains why the same works have so much less impact on her recordings.

The concert experience was intensified by Irit Batsry's videos, but not because they attempted to illustrate the music. Rather, they created a visual sounding board that knocked the audio ideas into higher relief. Lang's simplicity of means was heard while a rear screen erupted with black-and-white sunbeams, ripples and magnified microbes. I'm not sure why it worked, but it did.