

Lucid Culture

Pablo Ziegler and Maya Beiser Tango Through Le Poisson Rouge

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While it's hardly necessary for a musician to be immersed in a particular style since childhood in order to play it well, growing up with a genre doesn't hurt. Last night at Le Poisson Rouge pianist **Pablo Ziegler** and cellist **Maya Beiser** celebrated their Argentinian heritage with a mix of Piazzolla classics and Ziegler originals, **Satoshi Takeishi** propelling the trio with a master class in restraint and subtle intensity behind the drum kit. Ziegler was a Piazzolla collaborator through the end of the composer's life, and has been a major force in tango nuevo in his own right. Beiser is well known as a powerful and eclectic presence in the new-music scene: how does she approach playing Piazzolla and Ziegler? Like she'd grown up with them, dancing in her chair at one point as the trio kicked off the show with a bustling, noirish, Mingus-esque take of Piazzolla's Michaelangelo [70]. Ziegler's arrangements and also his originals gave Beiser a launching pad for tracking down every bit of restless unease in the genre-spanning compositions: his part's in his blood, meticulous yet forceful, whether driving the rhythm, adding jazzy flourishes or the occasional joyous glissando.

Ziegler recounted that Piazzolla enjoyed fishing for sharks, then led the group through the cinematic fish tale Escualo, Beiser reeling the line out with a perfectly timed microtonal swoop, kicking off its leaping, jaunty ballet-esque imagery all the way through to the big, slashing crescendo at the end. By contrast, the insistent longing in Piazzolla's A Year of Solitude lingered vividly, as did a brooding, plaintive Ziegler piece that Beiser approached with a suspenseful vibrato, and a terse arrangement of Brazilian composer Egberto Gismonti's Agua Y Vinho.

Introducing Piazzolla's Fuga Y Misterioso, Ziegler reminded the crowd how much of a fan of Bach Piazzolla was, and then reminded them again as Beiser played lively rapidfire riffage over Ziegler's matter-of-factly precise baroqueisms. Beiser got a brief solo turn, playing Mariel, an aching, envelopingly atmospheric Osvaldo Golijov requiem originally written for cello and vibraphone, against her own recording of slow sustained notes and minimalist accents. As affecting as this was, it would have been even more interesting to have seen three cellists play it: there's no telling how much more magic they might have been able to conjure up.

After a 1970s-era lullaby by Ziegler, the ensemble wowed what looked like a sold-out crowd with a plaintive version of Piazzolla's Adios Nonino, then a swinging, somewhat satirical portrait of a macho doofus written by Ziegler and then closed with an impressively understated version of the iconic Libertango, its restrained, tense revelry a perfect resolution of the tension between Piazzolla the pop tunesmith and Piazzolla the modernist composer. The crowd wanted an encore; they got an unselfconsciously beautiful rendition of Ziegler's Muchacha de Boedo. Considering how much fun everyone onstage was having, let's hope they keep this richly enjoyable project going.