Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott Grace Disney Hall

R. Daniel Foster · Sunday, April 7th, 2024

Cellist Yo-Yo Ma, joined by longtime collaborator pianist Kathryn Stott, performed at Walt Disney Concert Hall on April 3 to a packed and enrapt audience. The program included two Fauré selections, along with pieces by Dvo?ák, Shostakovich, and the minimalist master, Arvo Pärt, among others.

Fauré's lyrical "Berceuse" Op. 16 opened the evening, the pair of musicians lending the piece remarkable sensitivity and artistry. From the first notes, Ma's cello and Stott's piano established a delicate and intimate dialogue, drawing listeners into the serene and tender world of the lullaby ("Berceuse" is French for "lullaby.") Ma's cello gently wove its melodic lines over Stott's graced accompaniment, setting the tone for the entire performance—one of elegance, tranquility, and profound emotional depth. As ever, both of their phrasings were exquisite.

Dvo?ák's "Songs My Mother Taught Me" was next up, the most notable of the composer's "Gypsy Songs" work. It's been described as "sad but at once optimistic." The folkloric work alternates between lilting phrases and a poignant and reflective melancholy. Ma's cello began the haunting melody, joined by Stott's delicate notes. Ma and Stott's dialogue produced warm and tender phrasing, with notes of yearning.

Ma often gazed up or to the side, his eyes off the book, having fully embodied the music.

Having played together for forty years, Ma and Stott work hand in glove. Their musical partnership is seamless, balanced, and utterly synchronized. Stott is internationally recognized as one of Britain's most versatile and imaginative pianists. The Washington Post has called her "every bit Ma's equal, playing with striking individuality."



Yo-Yo Ma. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Philharmonic

The pair's rendition of Fauré's "Papillion," Op. 77 was every bit as remarkable. From the opening bars, Ma's cello delicately fluttered like the wings of a butterfly over Stott's shimmering piano accompaniment, cueing up a performance that was ethereal and profoundly expressive. "Papillion," meaning, "butterfly" in French, is a musical depiction of the delicate, fleeting movements of these creatures.

Arvo Pärt's "Spiegel im Spiegel" is a transcendent and deeply meditative musical experience that, if listened to carefully, can mesmerize and transport. The minimalist masterpiece invites listeners to deep introspection. The piece was accompanied by a projection screen showing nature photos and those from the Hubble Space Telescope. I found the images, presented in dissolving slide show format, distracting, pulling attention away from the music that demanded an uncompromised ear. "Spiegel im Spiegel" translates to "Mirror in the Mirror" in English, and so it's characterized by repetitive and hypnotic melodies.



Pianist Kathryn Stott. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Philharmonic

Ma's cello sang with a sense of ethereal beauty as it produced a luminous sound, and Stott's piano accompaniment was equally sublime, providing a delicate touch with subtle dynamics. Stott's piano provided gentle arpeggios and otherworldly harmonies. Time stood still.

Together, Ma and Stott have toured the globe and released multiple albums including 2020's Songs of Comfort and Hope, a project that responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The LA Phil's upcoming schedule.

The Hollywood Bowl schedule.

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