



CELLIST MAYA BEISER AT BARD SUMMERSCAPE: A REVIEW

by **Abby Luby**

Famed über cellist Maya Beiser charmed and dazzled last week's sold out crowd at Bard College SummerScape's Spiegeltent. The infinite reflections in the mirrored tent fully complemented Beiser's mesmerizing and reverberating performance. It was an evening of several, perfect moments.

The concert, "The Music of Astor Piazzolla and Beyond," featured special guest pianist Donal Fox. He and Beiser played a wide range of musical selections— from jazz to tango, experimental to classical, with original works and arrangements by Fox.

Beiser's opening solo was "Just Ancient Loops," a work composed by Michael Harrison for and dedicated to Beiser. A complex but accessible piece, Beiser accompanies herself on pre-recorded tracks that multiply exponentially to 22 cello parts, ascending to a final, symphony of cellos. Beiser prefaced the work by explaining that Harrison's work was inspired by ancient Greek music, Indian ragas,

minimalism, among others. The 25-minute opus guided us through a surge of diverse themes, from mellow, harmonic drones to frenzied syncopations, like a river flow of exhilarating, rushes of white water changing to dark, slow pools. Beiser's dramatic stage presence coupled with Harrison's seductive sonorities was a sensorial smörgåsbord. Speedy pizzicatos blurred the cellist's fingers while full, resonate chords drawn from sustained bows quieted Beiser to close her eyes in deep concentration. Rocking and swaying with her cello, stiletto heels tapping, eyebrows flaring, Beiser engaged with her instrument like with a partner in a provocative dance.

In the soulful and tempestuous "Mariel" by Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov, Beiser's florid, arpeggiated string crossings created pre-recorded pedal points like a satin lining showing off a gleaming, melodic gem. She leaned into thick, sustained notes with lush vibratos contrasted with spicy, bow bouncing spiccatos.



Donal Fox. Photo Lou Jones.

Donal Fox matched Beiser's virtuosity in a seamless compilation of Bach, a Piazzolla Tango, jazz improvisations. His flashy, keyboard technique was impressive and his calibrated sensitivity to Beiser's temperament made for the perfect musical duo who exchanged many intense, dialogues of sound.

Much has been written about Beiser, and for good reason. She has taken the cello into the 21st century, harnessing a plethora of new sounds to perform the work of today's contemporary composers. Her vast discography, released on the Sony Classical, Nonesuch, Koch (now E1), Innova, and Cantaloupe Music labels, includes five solo albums and many studio recordings and film music collaborations. Her 2010 album *Provenance* topped the classical and world music charts on both Amazon and iTunes. Beiser has been the featured soloist on several film soundtracks including M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening*, Denzel Washington's *The Great Debaters*, Edward Zwick's *Blood Diamond*, and Rupert Sanders' *Snow White and the Huntsman*. Raised on a kibbutz in the Galilee Mountains in Israel by her French mother and Argentinean father. Beiser is a graduate of Yale University and her teachers included Aldo Parisot, Uzi Weizel, Alexander Schneider, and Isaac Stern. She was the founding cellist of the new music ensemble, the Bang on a Can All-Stars. Her NPR [Tiny Desk Concert](#) features a captivating performance of Harrison's *Just Ancient Loops* and Golizjov's *Mariel*.



Maya Beiser. Photo by Jim Allen

Beiser is a featured soloist on the soundtrack by James Newton Howard for M. Night Shyamalan's science fiction film *After Earth*,

starring Jaden and Will Smith, which is in wide release this summer. Her recording of David Lang's *World To Come IV* from her album, *World To Come*, is featured in the new Italian film *La Grande Bellezza*.

More on Maya Beiser go to www.mayabeiser.com/
For more about Bard's SummerScape Festival go to [SummerScape](#)