

The Washington Post

Music

Midori and Ieva Jokubaviciute demand attention with performance at Library of Congress



Violinist Midori performed at the Library of Congress with pianist Ieva Jokubaviciute on Nov. 2.
(Timothy Greenfield-Sanders)

By **Matthew Guerrieri**

November 3, 2019 at 5:17 p.m. EST

Music's consoling properties often are emphasized to the detriment of its other powers. (Even William Congreve's famous description of its charms soothing a savage breast was originally spoken by a character who promptly disagreed.) On Saturday, Midori and Ieva Jokubaviciute presented a violin and piano program at the Library of Congress focused instead on music demanding and quickening the attention: five works, by living composers, pushing at boundaries between pitch and noise, expectation and risk, diversion and challenge.

Vivian Fung's "Birdsong" set the tone, moving from glassy impressionism to a diabolically twittering reel and slashing accents, a hike through a minatory forest. In Olga Neuwirth's "Quasare/Pulsare," Jokubaviciute moved in and out of the piano, key and hammer giving way to direct manipulation of the strings, while Midori offered edgy, high-contrast shards, a cosmos of scrapes, thumps and keening comets. Tamar Diesendruck's Library-commissioned "Unruly Strands," a premiere, was an extensive menagerie, a biology of musical cells evolving into dense profusion—mercurial, clipped, voluble—then pared away to skeletal lyricism, setup and payoff in tenaciously patient, almost Beethovenian proportion.

A previous Library commission, Sofia Gubaidulina's 1993 "Dancer on a Tightrope," turned conventional classical rhetoric inside out: disjointed, etude-like violin flourishes—a faltering Paganini, perhaps—pulled back to reveal ominous, anxious sounds, Jokubaviciute again inside the piano, using a glass to coax the strings into icy hums and roaring howls. Even the rousing finale, Franghiz Ali-Zadeh's Eurasian-flavored song-and-dance "Habil Sayagi," was laced with disquiet, violin rhapsodies smeared with microtonal inflection, the piano's strings, keys and even lid mined for percussive effect.

The players dug deep into often noisy textures while sustaining tonal richness. Midori's is still the singular sound familiar from her long affiliation with the virtuosic standards: big, focused, strongly projected, uncannily smooth and consistent bowing across a broadband spectrum of volume and color. Jokubaviciute approaches the piano with attentive precision—every note, keyed or otherwise, placed within the instrument's resonance for maximum clarity—combined with a provocative, febrile intelligence.

The evening was largely free of the classical canon's traditional comforts, sometimes producing a palpable restlessness among much of the audience. But it also, maybe, was an opportunity to consider whether our craving for comfort has changed the world for the better. Midori and Jokubaviciute instead privileged another human ability, one that might well prove more useful: finding beauty in a harsh environment.