



## Cicely Parnas, cellist

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#### Cellist Cicely Parnas at the Kennedy Center

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Photo: Christian Steiner

Even in the realm of performing arts, if you do something long enough, a feeling of routine and “another day at the office” can creep in. I have covered scores of young artist debuts over the years, and everyone with the talent and wherewithal to be presented in one of the city’s top venues is extraordinary and commendable. But even in that extremely rarefied stratum, a certain sameness eventually takes hold.

Debuts that jolt me out of complacency happen less than once a year, but cellist Cicely Parnas gave one Monday at the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater, presented by the Young Concert Artists Series.

Self-possessed and prepossessing, Parnas is musically poised beyond her 20 years. Her bow-arm is perfection itself, and with it she sculpts phrases of lapidary detail.

She already understands that, on a string instrument, there is as much beauty to be found between the notes as during them. The clarity of articulation in passage-work and the skill with which she shaped lyrical lines were startling. This was artistry that cannot be taught; the musician simply owns it.

Tempos in the Debussy and Brahms (Op. 99) sonatas were often brisk, perhaps too much so. Her expert pianist, Noreen Polera, seemed caught off-guard at some of them. But every gesture, virtuoso or dramatic, came off with great effect. Parnas’s preternatural accuracy all over the fingerboard made the Cassadó “Suite for Solo Cello” almost a trifle, instead of the minatory hornet’s-nest of difficulties that most cellists find it. She also offered a new work by Peter John, “From the Zodiac.” Although the second movement’s focus on sound effects — seeming to come from an electronic-music palette — eventually became grating, the outer movements were full of assertive and expressive music and elicited real enthusiasm from the audience.

Parnas’s phenomenal intensity of sound will, in the years to come, undoubtedly be leavened by a wider frame of musical and artistic influences, her impetuous tempos expanding to find yet more expressive detail and emotional states. But she could not possibly have planted a bolder flag than she did here. There are several cellists with major careers I could name to whom she is already superior. Brava!