



Edgar Moreau, cellist



Cellist Edgar Moreau of YCA

Philip Gardner | Oberon's Grove | February 2, 2016



Tuesday February 2nd, 2016 - Young Concert Artists presenting the New York recital debut of French cellist Edgar Moreau, with Jessica Xylina Osborne, pianist, at Merkin Hall.

Greeting us this evening, Young Concert Artists founder and director Susan Wadsworth spoke of a performance she had attended had at the Verbier Festival where Edgar Moreau was performing in a chamber music concert. Susan was so impressed by the young cellist that she invited him to participate in YCA's audition process; Mr. Moreau agreed, and he won first prize. And *voilà!...he's onstage at Merkin Hall, to the delight of a large and enthusiastic crowd at Merkin Hall.*

Mr. Moreau is a handsome and charismatic fellow, which is all to the good, but none of that would matter if he didn't have the technique, artistry, and passion to set himself apart from other attractive young musicians. Tonight, in a demanding program, he established his credentials as a player of remarkable caliber. His intriguing presence, marvelously messy hair, and expressive face - a far-seeking gaze, a hint of a smile, an ever-so-slight trace of madness - were all reflections of the inner poet. There's something wonderfully Olde World about Edgar Moreau, like a re-incarnation of someone who might have made music with Schubert, or been friends with Chopin. He plays a 1711 David Tecchler cello.

Opening with Johann Sebastian Bach's Sonata No. 3 in G minor, BWV 1029, Mr. Moreau immediately began to display his musical flair and his distinctive persona. Serious and impassioned, he seems to live the music. The young cellist was most fortunate tonight to have as his musical accomplice the excellent pianist Jessica Xylina Osborne. Together they played the Bach sonata's opening *Vivace* at a very swift pace - exhilarating! - and then moved on to a deeply felt *Adagio* in which Mr. Moreau's incredibly beautiful tone spoke directly to the heart and soul. For the concluding *Allegro*, I simply write "Wow!" on my playbill: the evening was off to a grand start.



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César Franck's *Sonata in A major* began life as a violin sonata, or at least that's how it was first publicly performed. The familiar themes take on a darker hue (and perhaps an even more poignant expressiveness) when played on a cello. In this sonata, brimming with melodic inspiration, Mr. Moreau demonstrated a sublime mastery of the gradations of vibrato, with an astute measuring of the music's lyricism. The resonance of his playing was spine-tingling, and Ms. Osborne brought wonderfully nuanced pianism into the mix. The two musicians seemed to inspire one another constantly, and their rapport was telepathically keen. The sonata's "false ending" produced a charmingly mis-timed volley of applause, but the intrepid artists were able to immediately re-establish the atmosphere and carry on to the actual end, where the audience could at last unleash their applause and shouts of "bravo!" The Moreau-Osborne duo is truly simpatico.

Alfred Schnittke's *Sonata No. 1 for cello and piano* dates from 1978; this was my second *live* experience of this complex and very rewarding piece.

It opens with the cello alone, soon joined by the piano in a *misterioso* mood. A slithering, scurrying passage played deftly by Mr. Moreau evokes thoughts of Klytemnestra's murder in Strauss's ELEKTRA. The piano gets emphatic, and the two instruments set forth on a rumbling race. A jazzy bit of *agitato* leads to a relentlessly driven passage: things go rather dotty, and then wild. A big crash! Then Ms. Osborne ripples up the keyboard. Passion soars, almost to the point of insanity, only to suddenly go quiet. Dense emotion from the cellist - like a prayer, deeply sorrowful and full of yearning.

The mood is broken by some jazzed-up plucking, but then the cello plunges to the darkest depths. Here Mr. Moreau astounded me with a prolonged one-handed *pianissimo* on the lowest string of his cello - it seemed eternal - whilst Ms. Osborne played dreamily. A delicate plucked coda, then the cello sustains in the low register as the piano drifts into a stratospheric fade-out. Magical!

The Schnittke, which held the audience in a rapt silence throughout, showed the two artists at their absolute finest - high praise - and drew admiring waves of applause as the musicians took their bows.

The evening's concluding work, Chopin's *Introduction and Polonaise Brillante, Op. 3* represents the only instrument other than piano for which the composer wrote anything of consequence. Tonight the composer's melodious purity and - later - a sense of stately joy were set forth with ample radiance by Mr. Moreau and Ms. Osborne. The pianist gets quite rhapsodic before the two burst into the '*alla polacca*' where cello and piano take turns playing rhythm and melody.

A warm and wonderfully sincere standing ovation greeted the artists, and an encore was most welcome: a splendid *czardas* where Mr. Moreau dug into the gypsy passions of the opening slow theme before he and Ms. Osborne set off virtuosic fireworks in a delicious romp. The audience could not wait for the final note to be sounded before unleashing a gale of applause and cheers.