

Nightclub Sounds, Including Schubert

By STEVE SMITH Published: February 4, 2009

Ever in search of new audiences to convert, classical music has lately beaten a path to the nightclub with increasing frequency, to varying results. For many young, eclectic composers and performers whose work deals in amplification, electronics and pop-music borrowings, a chatty crowd and the clink of beer bottles is familiar territory. But those same ambient noises can play havoc with a more conventional performance, especially in music reliant on a delicate balance of acoustic instruments.



The violinist Anne Akiko Meyers could hardly have done a better job of adapting her usual working mode to fit the brief, casual concert she presented on Tuesday night at Le Poisson Rouge, a fashionable Bleecker Street club that regularly includes classical performers among its offerings. True, this was as much a social event as a recital: Ms. Meyers has just issued an appealing new CD, “Smile,” on the Koch International Classics label, and Tuesday’s audience was packed with friends, family members and record company executives.

Jennifer Taylor for The New York Times

Anne Akiko Meyers: The violinist highlighted “Smile,” her new CD, at Le Poisson Rouge on Tuesday.

The bulk of Ms. Meyers’s program consisted of works from the disc, an eclectic collection of mostly short, tuneful pieces: Charlie Chaplin’s nostalgic “Smile,” Astor Piazzolla’s seductive “Milonga en Re” and “Introducción al Ángel,” Michio Miyagi’s wistful “Haru no Umi” (“Sea in Spring”). She played with an unfailingly sweet tone, molding her phrases like a singer. The pianist Akira Eguchi, Ms. Meyers’s partner here and on the CD, played with his customary clarity and taste.

From Schubert’s Fantasy in C (D. 934), the most substantial and challenging work on the disc, she offered only the closing section. If anyone needed reminding that Ms. Meyers is a performer of substance and skill, here was the proof. Her feathery lines wafted upward on Mr. Eguchi’s tremulous zephyrs during the opening bars, then the two emphatically drove through a fleet, clean finale.

Ms. Meyers’s success here went beyond the music. Her cheerful banter, which at times turned endearingly gawky, was a perfect match to the setting. And the club itself cooperated, proving surprisingly well suited to unamplified playing.

Borrowing a bit of nightclub jargon, Ms. Meyer announced that she would be “closing her set” with Harold Arlen’s “Over the Rainbow.” Her gorgeous phrasing in that well-worn chestnut had a refreshing spontaneity. Along with her encore, an unaccompanied arrangement of Gershwin’s “Summertime,” it made you wish there had been another set to come.