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New Classical Tracks: Violinist Lara St. John joins forces with pianist Matt Herskowitz in the key of A major

May 20, 2020



Violinist Lara St. John. Andrew Ousley (Unison Media)

- ▶ 5min : New Classical Tracks: Lara St. John
- ▶ 22min 6sec : New Classical Tracks: Lara St. John (Extended Audio)

Lara St. John/Matt Herskowitz — *The Key of A (Ancalagon)*

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"This first month. It has been actually kind of this is the first time I've ever been home for a month. I think like ever. And and it's been kind of weird, but but kind of almost nice in a way to have a routine for the first time in my life."

Canadian violinist Lara St. John lives in NYC, right in the heart of the Covid-19 pandemic in this country. As you might imagine, her world has changed dramatically.

"Actually the other day I took to 15 different people and made Canadian pea soup because it's very comforting and took it to a whole bunch of musician friends."

One of her closest musician friends is pianist Matt Herskowitz. Together, they've just released a new recording which features two sonatas in the key of A major, each of which is considered the pinnacle of their respective eras. Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata from the Classical era, and Cesar Franck's Sonata for violin and piano.

The title is The Key of A. Tell me about that? I mean, obviously the two pieces are in A major, but is there more to it than that?

"I have synesthesia somewhat, which is hearing something and seeing something at the same time in a way. So for me, keys have very specific colors. And for me, a is red.

And also just the like the album artwork, for example. Because it was written for two violinists. So two violin bows and the cross of the A is a Damascus dagger, which is from just sort of a little mention to the to the Kreutzer Sonata novella, which was inspired by the Kreutzer Sonata piece. Tolstoy wrote a small novel about, well, basically spoiler alert, the horrors of a bad marriage. So, the Damascus dagger comes in at the end.

"I mean, both sonatas were written for violinists by ... well, pianist/keyboard players, in the case of Franck, he was an organist. And I think the parts are incredibly equal. It's certainly not a violin and piano sonata. It's actually...Beethoven even wrote sonatas for piano and violin. And it's...the Kreutzer, for example, the Beethoven 9, it's a very extreme piece. Extreme tempos, extreme dynamics and Matt and I are both extreme people. So and extreme musicians. So it kind of it somehow it was a great pairing, I think, for this for this particular CD."

The Kreutzer sonata opens in a very challenging way and it's actually something that prevents some violinists from even wanting to take it on. How does that resonate with you, how do you approach it?

"The Kreutzer is so long that you don't put something before it in a half of a program. So basically, there you are, the violinist, there's a huge piano behind you. And you start all by yourself with these really awkward chords, actually. Thanks, Keyboard player Beethoven. I don't think anybody ever started sonata like that before that or even have since.

I mean he obviously wrote this for his good friend George Bridgetower, who actually was the original dedicatee. But it has something to do with a woman. And Bridgetower somehow offended Beethoven by saying something mean about a friend of his or something. So then, of course, Beethoven got all upset and rescinded the dedication and then thought, hey, why don't I dedicate it to this famous violinist named Rudolf Kreutzer, because then maybe he'll play it and it'll be awesome and Kreutzer hated it."

What do you love the most about this sonata? Because this is something you learned a little later in

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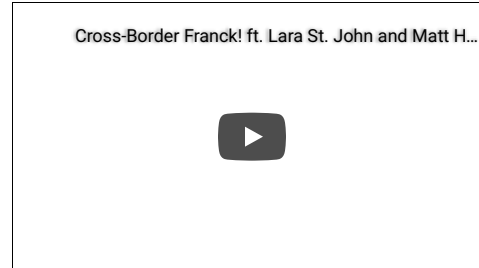
your career, right?

"When Matt and I started playing together, I thought, OK, this is somebody with whom I want to do the Kreutzer eventually. And the time of Beethoven, even Liszt, for example, variation movement. There's no way that he wouldn't Beethoven himself, that he wouldn't have done variations on his variations. And so we sort of went back to that somewhat lost tradition of of improvising the second time around.

Very cool. Bet you've learned a lot from him.

Like, I mean he could just sort of sit down and play for an hour and it can just come out of his head. And I think that that, for example, the first movement of the Franck, the way he the way we play it, it almost sounds as though like we're making it. And so that kind of spontaneity in playing is something that that that he has that I have not encountered so much in other pianists. "

To hear the rest of my conversation, click on the extended interview above, or [download the extended podcast on iTunes \(https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/new-classical-tracks-with-julie-amacher/id120586577?mt=2\)](https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/new-classical-tracks-with-julie-amacher/id120586577?mt=2) or wherever you get your podcasts.



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Note: Due to the coronavirus quarantines, we cannot send physical product at this time. Winners will be notified at the conclusion of the giveaway and will receive their prize as soon as possible after the crisis abates.

Resources

[Lara St. John/Matt Herskowitz — The Key of A \(https://www.larastjohn.com/albums/key-of-a\)](https://www.larastjohn.com/albums/key-of-a) (Ancalagon)

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