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“Lavuta” heats up the night

By [Sarah Young](https://kcmetropolis.org/author/sarah_young/) *February 13, 2018*

Smoldering rhythms and blistering tones dominated the performance by Lara St. John on the violin and Matt Hershkowitz at the piano on Sunday evening in the Carlsen Center's Polsky Theatre.

On Sunday night at the Polsky Theatre in Carlsen Center, Lara St. John, violin and Matt Hershkowitz, piano, presented a program called “Lavuta,” a combination of pieces inspired by the sounds of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. While the numbers on the first half were not specifically from this region, they did evoke the sounds and images of the East.

Cesar Franck's *Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major* is truly a duet for skilled musicians of both instruments, ably demonstrated in St. John and Hershkowitz's complete absorption of Franck's technically demanding but infinitely emotional work.

The Franck Sonata was followed by two unexpected arrangements by Hershkowitz of George Gershwin's "But Not for Me" and "Fascinating Rhythm." His jazzy arrangements for violin and piano are surprisingly satisfying and aurally complex, moving in and out of Gershwin's text, weaving a tapestry of intricate harmonies. The complex stride rhythms added to "Fascinating Rhythm" in particular highlighted and supported the soaring violin sound.

In the concert's second half, St. John and Hershkowitz emphasized their tour of Eastern European folk and traditional tunes arranged by contemporary composers. Beginning with "Ah, Ya Zayn," which is a Levantine folk song meaning "Oh, Beautiful One," St. John showed off her sensitivity and understanding of this music. John Kameel Farah's arrangement of the tune emphasizes the longing, melancholic tones of the violin, and the multiple "verses" of the original tune allow variations and ornamentations that convey the emotional range of the piece.

With "Čoček," arranged by Milica Paranosic, St. John demonstrated the unusual meter of Romani dance music (often 7/8 or 9/8) that emphasizes its forward, dance-like movement.

The gorgeous arrangement of "Sari Siroun Yar" ("Beauty of the Mountains") was really the highlight of the second half. This song from Armenia arranged by Serouj Kradjian, demonstrated St. John and Hershkowitz's true understanding and love of this music as their collaboration sang in tender, haunting tones of the beauty of homelands and the crashing pain of loss.

Hershkowitz's arrangement of the traditional "Hava Nagila," (called here "Nagilara") reminded the audience of his inventive style, amusing and compositionally unique. While, as St. John suggested, the fundamental tune nearly disappears under the ornamentation, the piece clings to the simple melody that pops into the line with some of its familiar easiness.

The concert concluded with a bizarre but fun and oddly satisfying mashup arrangement of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody, No 2* with the traditional "Czardas." The tour-de-force piece was a spectacular conclusion to an evening replete with St. John's dynamic playing and Hershkowitz's technical flair.

The series in the Polsky Theatre continues next week with the Charles Williams Trio.

REVIEW:

Lara St. John, Violin; Matt Herskowitz, Piano

“Laruta”

Sunday, February 11, 2018

Polsky Theatre at Johnson County Community College

12345 College Blvd, Overland Park, KS

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