

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Monica Germino Puts Electronics and Violin Together, and Myriad Sounds Ensue



Michael Nagle for The New York Times

Monica Germino performing at the Austrian Cultural Forum.

By CORINNA da FONSECA-WOLLHEIM
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For more than two centuries the preferred duo partner of the violin was the piano. With its powerful sound and polyphonic possibilities it was like the male dancer in a pas de deux who acts as a foil for the violin's more supple, slender tone and allows it to soar. During a recital and workshop at the Austrian Cultural Forum on Thursday and Friday, the American-Dutch violinist Monica Germino presented the fruits of a very different partnership: violin and electronics.











Together with her regular collaborator, the electronic sound designer [Frank van der Weij](#), she performed a half-dozen new works by American and European composers in which Mr. van der Weij's digital wizardry amplified, distorted, fragmented and multiplied the voice of the solo violin. Part of the fun lay in the discovery of the resulting cool and unusual sounds, which ranged from Jimi Hendrix to radio-jamming signals and fire engine sirens. But Ms. Germino's interest clearly lies in the dramatic possibilities of a partnership that is ultimately focused on empowering the violinist.

In Julia Wolfe's "With a Blue Dress On," the focus of a workshop on Friday afternoon (the piece was to be performed on Sunday as part of the Bang on a Can marathon), Ms. Germino tapped, stomped, played, hummed and sang over eight recorded tracks of herself playing, humming and singing. The guileless simple harmonies of the folk song about a pretty little girl in a blue dress who steals mules and breaks hearts became a vehicle for a gloriously free and wild fiddle tantrum in which virtuosity and mischief-making went hand in hand.

There were multiples of Ms. Germino in attendance at [Thursday evening's concert](#), too. In Arnoud Noordegraaf's psychologically dark and unsettling "Fugue" they even took on visual form as she played standing behind a sheer screen. Recorded video images of her performing flickered over this screen at unpredictable intervals, creating an arresting

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duality of sound and image. A distinctive aspect of Ms. Germino's playing is her earthy and sharp pizzicati, and in this piece they seemed to trigger the recorded images like snapping brain synapses.

In Donnacha Dennehy's "Overstrung" for amplified acoustic violin and soundtrack, a few well-placed pizzicato notes helped to ground the static flyaway sound of digitally processed harmonics. It felt sometimes as if the overtones of the notes themselves had entered into a conversation with one another.

An emotional highlight was [Annie Gosfield's](#) "Long Waves and Random Pulses" for violin and jammed radio signals. Ms. Gosfield used audio samples of sound patterns used by Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union during World War II to interfere with enemy radio transmissions, as well as a snippet of the Chaconne from Bach's Partita in D minor that briefly flickered through the sonic mayhem. The sound palette created by these multiple layers was astonishingly rich, and at times the virtuosic violin line above the repetitive radio signal patterns took on the tried-and-tested beauty of a Vivaldi concerto.

Ms. Germino's rock 'n' roll moment came in "Fuzzbox Logic" by David Dramm for electric violin, soundtrack and five fuzzboxes — distortion generators — which she activated through foot pedals. The binary fire-engine siren of the violin's opening line grew multiple dimensions as the distortion created the illusion of spatial and acoustic depth.

Karlheinz Essl's "Sequitur III" for violin and live electronics demanded the most active engagement of Ms. Germino with the electronic musical component. Filtered through a computer program written by Mr. Essl, elements of her live playing were looped and played back in unpredictable ways, forcing her to adapt her own playing to the constantly changing sonic environment.

The concert ended with Louis Andriessen's purely acoustic "Xenia," which opens with juicy double-stopped glissandi and ends with the performer's singing a text by Rimbaud over an elegiac melody in the violin. After the electronic fireworks, this work brought out an affecting vulnerability in Ms. Germino. It also served as a reminder of how empowering Mr. van der Weij's input had been all evening as he worked from behind a large control table at the back of the hall. Written in 2005, "Xenia" was also the oldest piece on the program.

"In my world, that's a long time ago," Ms. Germino said.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: July 5, 2013

A critic's notebook article on June 17 about a recital and a workshop by the violinist Monica Germino and the electronic sound designer Frank van der Weij, at the Austrian Cultural Forum in Manhattan, misspelled the surname of the composer of a work that was performed, "With a Blue Dress On." She is Julia Wolfe, not Woolfe.

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