

Concert Review: Gil Morgenstern's Reflections Series at the Rubin Museum of Art, NYC 1/24/10

January 25, 2010

Violinist [Gil Morgenstern's](#) imaginative multimedia [Reflections Series](#) is one of the most original and interesting cultural events bubbling around the surface of the radar here in New York. Beginning at the [Rubin Museum of Art](#) a couple of years ago – with this season's series continuing there through April 25 – Morgenstern's vision was to create programs that semi-thematically blend chamber music with theatre, visual art and/or literature. Since the Rubin Museum is currently hosting the first-ever public exhibit of Carl Jung's legendary Red Book, it only made sense to put together a bill that linked to Jung, even if tangentially through the work of Sylvia Plath – who as it turns out was a rather enthusiastic advocate of the archetypal archetypist.

As memorably as Morgenstern and pianist [Donald Berman](#) played their dream-themed mix of Schubert, Sibelius, Cage and Enesco, it was [Elizabeth Marvel](#) who held the crowd rapt with a powerful, vivid and strikingly nuanced evocation of Plath. Reading from a diverse selection of prose, sometimes solo, sometimes over the music, Marvel's portrayal gave the doomed writer an energy that bordered on manic-depressive, a brightness and unselfconscious joie de vivre that made her darker moments and the foreshadowing thereof all the more ominous. From rapt, early morning connect-the-dots dream interpretation, to diva-esque yet genuine alienation brought on by the nightmare to end all nightmares, to a delectably deadpan reading of a Plath story about a woman jousting with her husband's overactive imagination and its brutally ironic consequences, Marvel was...well, you guess the word. She's no stranger to theatre devotees – she's won Obies and done everything from Shakespeare to Tennessee Williams to tv, so it's hardly a stretch to imagine how easily she could springboard this role into a one-woman show. It would bring down the house.

The musicians were no less inspired in what was essentially a dusk-to-dawn sequence. Both Morgenstern and Berman are best known as advocates of new music, yet they sank their teeth just as avidly into the pre-Romantic material on the bill. Morgenstern's incisive staccato right before the coda of Schubert's Fantasie Suite beautifully reprised the understated portent of Berman's chords opening the first movement, and his subtle vibrato added glimmer and warmth to the composer's nocturne Night and Dreams. Georges Enesco's Impressions of Childhood got an appropriately varied treatment: an uneasy country dance; a nervous lullaby; the brooding beauty of Wind in the Chimney, and a couple of pastoral miniatures. The most nightmarish moment was John Cage's Dream, Berman's piano casually colliding with Morgenstern's effectively acidic textures.

Fortuitously, the Reflections Series has expanded across the United States and beyond, with performances from Florida to Italy – the next one here is April 25 featuring music of Poulenc with readings from Dante's Inferno. And the Red Book continues to be on display at the Rubin Museum through February 15. The other current exhibits are also worth a look, notably the Indian, Nepalese and Tibetan religious and mystical paintings, mandalas, sculptures and miniatures. Free day is Friday starting at 7 PM.