

## Diane Monroe at “Art After Five”

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This past Friday I caught the second of two sets played by Diane Monroe and her group at the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s “[Art After Five](#)” series. These performances take place in the Great Stair Hall at the Museum. You can catch some music, get a drink or some food, and visit the galleries. (Warning – the night I went the second floor galleries were closed and I couldn’t see my favorite [Roger van der Weyden](#).) The sound is surprisingly good, given the vastness of the space – at least from my fairly up-close seat. With Monroe were her regular colleagues [Tony Miceli](#) on vibes and Anthony Marino on bass (you may know him from his commanding and sensitive work with [Dave Liebman](#)). [Arturo Stable](#) was a last minute substitute for Todd Isler on percussion.

**Monroe is an unusual artist, as she is at home in jazz, classical and crossover idioms.** Hearing her made you wonder why there aren’t more first-rate jazz violinists – **in her hands, the violin could do everything you would want a jazz soloist to command. She made the instrument swing smoothly and sing sweetly. She deployed percussive attacks to articulate driving rhythms. She could play elegantly over changes, stretch out in harmonically static sections, or move into pure texture and gesture as desired.** The violin did not have to apologize for its presence here.

Although the music was lively, the general tone was relaxed; no elaborate arrangements, given the late change in percussionist. There were standards – “Alone Together” and “Caravan”; an unaccompanied feature for Monroe on the traditional “Wade in the Water”, full of soulful color and drive; and a brief look at “In a Sentimental Mood” to close. A more extended piece was a Ralph Towner composition called “Icarus” – presented as a duo for Monroe and Miceli, this time in a more exploratory mode, Miceli’s floridly virtuosic vibes filling the texture. Towner is best known for his work with the group Oregon, and the late Oregon percussionist Colin Walcott came to mind on Friday because, like Walcott, Arturo Stable commands an intriguingly unconventional array of percussion instruments. He sets up like a trap set drummer, but he plays with a stick in just one hand, using the other hand without an implement. From what I could see, his setup includes a smallish bass drum with a kick pedal; some suspended cymbals; a small, elegantly tapered hand drum taking the place of a mounted tom-tom; what looked like the top half of a conga drum in lieu of a floor tom; and, instead of a hi-hat, some sort of concave metal disk fitted with a sandal strap and shaker beads and played with the left foot. There was also a cowbell played with a kick pedal as well as a few other toys. He seemed to be sitting on an unusual square wooden box instead of a conventional drummer’s throne – but this unexpectedly turned out to be a kind of hand-played log drum, as a vibrant Stable solo demonstrated.

**Strong soloists, sensitive ensemble players, attractive repertoire – and tasty [Starr](#) restaurants catering. A most enjoyable evening.**