

Philadelphia Music Project: Crossing Cultures

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The saying goes that "There's no such thing as a free lunch." but those who attended the most recent Philadelphia Music Project got just that; and a tasty one, too! The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage produced and funded the program held at the Curtis Institute of Music which consisted of two different panel discussions and the lunch in between. The panel sessions were expertly moderated by John Schaefer, executive producer of music programming at WNYC on August 12, 2011.

I am not a musician, so I was a bit afraid that the program would be over my head, but for the most part, this was not the case. Instead, the all day event turned out to be fun, fascinating and full of interesting material. The informal, buffet style lunch gave the audience the opportunity to speak directly with the presenters, musicians, and each other in the grand Bok room while enjoying their meal. By the end of the program I found that I had a new respect for the versatility of the violin and the creativity of contemporary composers. Keep your eyes on our calendar or the [Philadelphia Music Project](#) site for future events.



[Diane Monroe](#)'s musical foundation in jazz and classical music provided an American perspective for the role of violin in today's music. She said that jazz musicians were slow to adopt the violin due to its European origins and the narrow definition of jazz in its early days. Violin found its way into gypsy jazz and progressed through early violin virtuosos like Joe Venuti and Stuff Smith. If the marriage of bluegrass and African rhythms resulted in jazz, then what is the result of jazz plus classical? Third stream. She went on to describe her recent experience performing third stream composer, Dr. David Baker's, "Violin Concerto", which was written for her. Monroe was clearly comfortable in the role, but improvisation skills are not commonly part of classical musician's DNA so it was a challenge to locate an accompanying ensemble. Monroe described how her own innate ability for improv and emotional expression through her instrument was nearly lost through formal education because so much emphasis was placed on exacting technique. She expressed her belief that musicians must first be taught to listen to the music and concentrate on the meaning of the phrasing. A profound understanding of the music rather than a rarefied level of skill will result in an emotionally engaging performance.

Monroe, who is adept at performing "between the lines" by seamlessly shifting and integrating musical genres played an improvisation that brought tears to my eyes in its beauty and genuine emotion.