Nadina: the bassoon rockstar

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On Wednesday, Oct. 2, Nadina Mackie Jackson,world-renowned bassoonist, wowed her audience in Rosch Recital Hall. After a two hour master class earlier in the day, Jackson put on an hour long show playing both solo and with the students and faculty of the SUNY Fredonia bassoon studio. Breaking free from the typical mold of a classical musician, Jackson proved that a musician can be a rockstar on any instrument.

Jackson plays both modern and historical bassoons, recording and performing worldwide. She has received four Grammy nominations this year between two albums: best instrumental and best contemporary composition for Canadian Concerto Project, Volume One and best solo and best producer for Vivaldi Concerti, Volume One.

"It's fun to say 'Grammy nominee'," said Jackson about her success. "I haven't been invited to a mainstream, big event like it before."

To date, Jackson has released 11 albums of solo music, concertos and chamber music as well as appearing on hundreds of other orchestral recordings. She has performed as a soloist and principal bassoonist for many world-renowned orchestras throughout Canada, the United States and Europe, receiving awards and high praise from various critics for her talent.

The first thing audience members noticed about Jackson was her appearance. Her bright blue hair stood out the most to be sure, but her dress was no less fantastic. It was a dark emerald green and went from short corset in the front to a full feather train in the back. Over that was a sequin clad vest that shimmered in the stage lights. Jackson said that all her dresses are designed specifically for her so that nothing will catch on the bassoon as she plays.

Jackson played standing up, moving expressively with the music, dipping and swaying to the rhythms and melodies as if she was dancing with her bassoon. Her tone and technique were incredible and she bounced from high notes to low with ease, breezing through incredibly fast and complicated runs. Some of the runs were so fast they sounded almost like the buzz of a bee rather than individual notes.

The concert consisted of five pieces, only two of which were performed solo by Jackson. The first, "Sonatine" by Alexandre Tansman, was three movements long and moved from fast and technical to slow and emotive before finishing with runs played in a perfectly controlled frenzie.

The second was a 19 minute long piece that required Jackson to circular breathe through almost the entire song. Composer Luciano Berio wrote "Sequenza XII" with the idea that the performer would never once remove their mouth from the mouthpiece during the performance. It was a technically difficult piece, and Jackson stretched the music out over eight stands so that she never had to pause to turn a page. It was only her second time playing the piece as part of a longer program.

The effect that circular breathing had on the tones produced by the bassoon was incredible. It isn't apparent how accustomed we are to hearing the sharp breaths of a performer until they are absent. The fluidity that circular breathing created resulted in tones that sounded like the call of a loon or a wah-wah pedal on a guitar.

Jackson played one song, "Black" by Marc Mellits, with Laura Koepke, bassoon professor. They played the duet with their bassoons amplified, which is not at all normal for bassoon music. As well as making the bassoons louder, the amplification also made it sound like an instrument that belonged in a rock band, or the walking bass line in a jazz quartet.

Jackson has modified her bassoon in order to amplify it.

"Nadina drilled a hole in her bocal [the section between the mouthpiece and the rest of the instrument] to fit a microphone," Tira Denny, a senior bassoon performance major, said.

After the intermission Jackson welcomed students from the SUNY Fredonia bassoon studio to play two pieces with her. The first, "Concerto No. 25 in F major, RV 491" by Antonio Vivaldi, was from one of Jackson's Grammy-nominated albums. Wednesday was the first time she had played it with only other bassoons, and she was accompanied by four students.

MELISSA RECHIN / PHOTO EDITOR

BASSOONIST NADINA MACKIE JACKSON PERFORMS A CIRCULAR REED PIECE. TINA FESTIVAL.

The last piece could only be described as having sounded majestic. 12 students, Koepke and Jackson joined each other on stage to play "Canticle for the Earth" by Daniel Kellogg. With so many bassoons playing at once the sound was full and dramatic, and the somber melody created a sharp contrast with the other more technical pieces of the performance.

Denny, who said the piece was a lot of fun to play, remarked on the grandois sound of the piece. "Since the bassoon is not a very loud instrument it is interesting to play it in a big group and sound so large and present," she said. "It's almost as if we add up to a small brass ensemble or an organ."

Jackson was very accessible to the students of the bassoon studio, spending time with them between the masterclass and performance and going out with them after the show. It is clear that she enjoys being in the presence of students.

"It encourages me," Jackson said about playing with students. "Their energy is the best energy imaginable. So, to get to be around them, it re-inspires me, not that I need to be re-inspired because I like to do what I do . . . I want them to hear what I do and do better, and do more, because they will."

Professor Koepke said that having Jackson at Fredonia was extremely rewarding. She said that it is important for her students to play with different artists and grow accustomed to working with other professionals.

"I want [my students] to get exposed to different styles of players and a different approach to playing the bassoon and I want them to be inspired," she said. "I want them to be really excited about what they can do."

The response of the Fredonia bassoon students was exactly what Jackson and Koepke had hoped for. "Hearing her play motivated me to want to play and practice even more," said Denny. "It opens up our minds that we don't necessarily have to play in a classical setting; there are other ways we can succeed."

What the twerk is up with Miley?

HANNA NEUMANN
Special to The Leader

"If I can perform in front of 90 thousand people, then I can do anything," stated Miley Cyrus in her documentary The Movement which aired on MTV Wednesday, October 2.

Apparently, Miley can't be stopped.

This documentary covers the redefined life of Miley starting at the debut of her song "We Can't Stop". This debut marked the beginning of Miley's movement.

"The Movement has to be bigger than a record; it has to be like, taking over the world," Miley said. This documentary was noticeably about Miley proving that she is not crazy and that all of the decisions she makes are well planned and need to be executed perfectly.

The only thing that was missing from the documentary was some sort of insight into her grand thesis behind her decisions. For example: her controversial VMA performance, along with some style decisions — both musically and aesthetically — that she has recently assumed. In the documentary, she merely emphasized her self-expression.

"I had to do things that weren't me for so long, and now I can't do anything that is not cool and not me," said Miley in the documentary. I'm sure we all remember Miley as both Miley Stewart and Hannah Montana, her famous alter-ego in the Disney Channel hit series "Hannah Montana."

At least Miley brings up a good point: she has been this stereotypical idol for young girls in a role that she does not identify with. Can we blame her for finally unleashing her true self at the age of 20? Isn't this the time when people typically find themselves? Why is it different when Miley does this?

"I think Miley has changed a lot since her Disney days, and now I think that she is kind of putting on a gimmick. She seems to be doing certain things to become popular again and some of those things are a little risqué," said Kevin Koval, a TV digital film production major, when asked how he felt about contemporary Miley and her self-expression.

Miley said that this is "not a transition, it is a movement" when referring to her drastic changes in appearance and stylistic changes in her music.

"I think that she is trying really hard to get attention right now. I mean she can do her own thing, it's her choice, but I'm not really a fan," Maeghan Glynn, a sophomore early childhood education major, stated when asked about her opinion on Miley. "I think that her attitude and her forms of self-expression are a little extreme, not really what she has done physically to herself," she said.

"I let go of the past and needed people to see a change," said Miley when explaining her drastic change in appearance. "I finally could be the bad bitch that I am," Miley continued.

And, I mean — lets be real — she is absolutely a 'bad bitch' now and working it or — should I say 'twerking' it.

What about Miley's fans? Is her new controversial self-expression affecting her diehard fans who view Miley as a role model?

"I think everybody should have the right to self expression, but if you're just doing it to gain money or attention then I'm not sure if she is being a very good model to the young women who are watching and watching to follow her," said Kathy Rankin, a senior disciplinary studies major.

Isn't the American culture all about self-expression and individualism? At least that's what people assume. However, why is this different for Miley?

"I am being exactly who I want to be," announced Miley in the documentary.

Can we really tell her that this is wrong; that it isn't okay?

"It's 2013. I live in America — the land of the free. If you can't be yourself, then you aren't very free," said Miley.

She makes a valid point. If people want to be accepted for who they are and identify with, what is the problem with Miley Cyrus, a 20 year old woman, wanting the same thing?