



*The Embassy Series*  
Turkish Ambassador's Residence  
Washington, D.C.  
[www.allartsreview4u.com](http://www.allartsreview4u.com)  
April 5, 2007

It is not often that musicians find themselves upstaged by the wallpaper, but when the wallpaper is Turkish velvet nearly 100 years old, elaborately and almost ecstatically embroidered with tulips, roses and other flowers and covering the upper walls of a large salon in a handsome 1915 Washington mansion, sometimes musicians have to defer to history. Last night at the Residence of the Turkish Ambassador, the velvet wall-covering was only one example of a lengthy restoration project beautifully accomplished.

Cellist Efe Baltacigil and pianist Anna Polonsky, who presented the same concert last December to a New York audience at the Weill Recital Hall in Carnegie Hall, were chosen a year ago to inaugurate the renewed Residence by playing at the first concert in the renewed salon. For two years, Washington residents who use the Buffalo Bridge on Que Street to cross Rock Creek have been watching the elaborate restoration project from a distance. From the polished splendors of the white marble entrance hall to the gleaming sheen of the mahogany ceiling in the large dining room, the building is full again of a calculated Beaux Arts opulence.

The Embassy Series concert was precisely the sort of event the house had been designed to accommodate when commissioned by a man recorded in Washington social history as the Bottle Cap King, who presciently selected an architect with extensive experience working in Turkey. No bottle caps were visible, but a well-dressed audience of socialites and music-lovers applauded almost raucously when Franck's Sonata in A Major was played triumphantly.

The two young musicians, both of whom live now in the Philadelphia area, came originally from Turkey and Russia. Baltacigil has a fine control of his cello, and Polonsky's fingers ripple with dexterity through the most difficult passages of modern Turkish music. The opening composition, a sprightly Bach Sonata in G Major, was not entirely successful. Written originally as a trio sonata for two flutes and a bass continuo, it was adapted by Bach for other instruments and had been readapted for cello and piano. Obviously it was played on the instruments available, but might have been better acoustically in the Turkish Residence salon if the piano had been instead a harpsichord with a tighter range of volumes and power adjustments.

When Baltacigil and Polonsky shifted into the fascinating 1935 Sonata for cello and piano by modern Turkish composer Ahmet Adnan Saygun, Polonsky's extravagant skills at the keyboard began to shine.

For many listeners, this must have been their first exposure to modern Turkish classical music, but Baltacigel and Polonsky made their arguments convincingly. Polonsky presented a splendidly muscular performance of a very difficult piano part. The second movement, which often presents the cello in a solo format, was intensely melodic and seemed softer, more Western in overall impact, though apparently it is considered by musicologists an improvisation on a traditional Turkish elegy form. The third movement was slightly jazzlike, a startling conclusion from a musician who worked closely with Béla Bartók to study Turkish folk music.

The concluding Franck Sonata was memorable, played by both musicians with a legato of growing desire, only lightly withheld, in an atmosphere of unutterable joy. Franck composed the piece as a wedding gift to a Belgian violinist, and the piece is unashamedly emotional.

Stephen Neal Dennis  
[www.allartsreview4u.com](http://www.allartsreview4u.com)