

CELLONTAP

BY EVE DANIELS



THIS HALLOWEEN, MINNEAPOLIS' 400 BAR IS DRESSING UP AS A CONCERT HALL—WITHOUT THE FORMAL MASQUERADE.

As usual, the low lights will bare cigarette smoke, beer bottles and kitsch on all sides. But the same stage that's housed college radio rockers like The Breeders and Queens of the Stone Age will slip into something more classical: a solo cello performance.

COZY, NOT STUFFY

Matt Haimovitz, an Israeli-born cellist, has recast the typical classical music venue in recent years. He continues his 50-state tour at the 400 Bar on October 31 with a show that will be introduced by Minnesota Public Radio's Steve Seel (see page 152 for details).

While the West Bank watering hole might seem an unlikely place to hear the likes of Bach or Haydn, it's actually one of the tamer spots within Haimovitz's national tour.

Since the September release of *Anthem*—his latest album of works by living American composers such as Lou Harrison and Augusta Read Thomas—the adventurous artist has played for sold-out crowds at venues ranging

from punk mecca CBGB on New York's Bowery to the pulsating Elbo Room in San Fran's Mission District.

On a Gofriller cello of 1710, Haimovitz is sure to captivate the Minnesota audience with selections from the Bach Suites and from his latest recording, including an arrangement of Hendrix's "Star Spangled Banner," along with some Halloween-spirited improv.

Fans who can't make it to the live Twin Cities concert can catch Haimovitz on the air, as he talks with John Birge between 3 and 7 p.m. the day of the show, on all Minnesota Public Radio Classical Music Stations.

LEVEL PLAYINGFIELD

"At first, it's hard to imagine many club-goers being receptive to the idea of a solo cello replacing the amped-up angst they expect from clubs like the 400 Bar," admits Seel.

"You'd think it would take equal parts audacity and sheer courage to get up there and hope that you didn't get sprayed with beer?"

Despite any initial qualms, Seel believes that Haimovitz is onto something critically important: "Modern 20-somethings, particularly college-educated ones, simply respect performers who level with them," he says.

"If they get the sense that this is simply an intelligent, talented guy who wants to play them some music he thinks they'll like, they'll give him a chance."

Judging by his track record, chances are good. At laid-back settings across the country, Haimovitz has drawn in a cross-section of all ages and classical music backgrounds. With his fresh approach and amazing talent, he's packing the house and making headlines wherever he takes the stage.

INTENSE FOCUS

Now in his early 30s, Haimovitz began his music studies at the age of seven. By the time he graduated from Harvard in 1996 and met composer Luna Pearl Woolf (now his wife of six years), his teachers had included cello masters Irene Sharp, Gabor Rejto, Leonard Rose and Ron Leonard.

Haimovitz has been honored internationally with numerous awards. He's performed with renowned conductors like Charles Dutoit, Leonard Slatkin and Michael Tilson Thomas.

He's also appeared with myriad symphony orchestras and philharmonic organizations, has performed at the world's most celebrated chamber music festivals and has collaborated with distinguished musicians of several generations.

Along with his unbounded performing activities, Haimovitz is a record label entrepreneur and heads the cello program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

KEEPING CLASSICAL REAL

Even with his remarkable success, Haimovitz continues to play cafes and beer halls around the United States.

Between sets, he tries out a few jokes and shares a few insights with the audience, then sells CDs from his trunk after the show. Bach would be proud.

"He's respecting the audience's intelligence, rather than going the usual route, which is thinking that just because a kid has multiple body-piercings, he therefore has to have such 'high art' dumbed-down for him," Seel observes. "So I think it's a brilliant idea—and I can't wait to see what happens." <—>