

Violinist's all-French concert magnifique

By Edward Reichel

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JUDITH INGOLFSSON, Libby Gardner Concert Hall, University of Utah, Wednesday.

Christmas came on Wednesday this year. That was the day violinist Judith Ingolfsson played in Libby Gardner Concert Hall.

Ingolfsson's recital was an absolute treat. Playing an all-French program, the young Icelandic-born violin virtuoso put her ample talents on display. A performer of consummate artistry, she wowed the audience with her musicality and technique. Ingolfsson is one of the rare breed of performers who looks past the notes into the heart and soul of the music. A recital with her is a journey of discovery. It's as if one is hearing these works for the first time.

Accompanying Ingolfsson was Anne Epperson. She is a wonderful pianist who supported her partner with finely crafted playing. She never overpowered Ingolfsson; there was a perfect balance between the two players that one doesn't come across often enough today.

The works Ingolfsson chose was a glorious excursion into French violin music of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. On the program was music by Claude Debussy, Henri Vieuxtemps, Eugene Ysaye and Cesar Franck.

Ingolfsson opened with Debussy's Sonata in G minor for Violin and Piano, one of his last works. In it, Debussy tempers his impressionist language with an austerity that casts a somber spell over the work. Ingolfsson captured that character well, although she didn't linger over the moodiness of the music. Instead, she brought a refreshing expressiveness to her playing that underscored the lyricism of the work. The Debussy was paired with Vieuxtemps' "Trois Morceaux," op. 40. One of the great violinist/composers of the second half of the 19th century, Vieuxtemps wrote music that showed off the violinist without resorting to empty virtuosity.

Ingolfsson gave a tour de force performance of these three captivating pieces. Her playing once again emphasized the lyricism of the music without sacrificing anything in the way of virtuosity. And there was also just the right amount of romantic passion to make these pieces vibrant.

After intermission, Ingolfsson returned alone to the stage to play Ysaye's Sonata No. 6, the last of a set of solo violin sonatas that can stand comparison with J.S. Bach's sonatas and partitas for violin. A challenging work to pull off, Ingolfsson made short work of it. She made it look easy as she maneuvered her way through the intricacies of the writing, giving a powerful performance of a piece that tests the mettle of any violinist.

Ingolfsson and Epperson closed out the recital with Franck's splendid Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano. A massive work of symphonic proportions with large sweeping phrases, Ingolfsson captured its luxuriant romanticism with her radiant playing. Her reading was certainly bold where it needed to be, but it was never harsh. She tempered it with exquisitely crafted and fluid lines that brought the expressiveness of the music to the fore.

There was one encore—a touchingly tender reading of Jascha Heifetz's arrangement of Debussy's song "Beau Soir."