

Yo-Yo Ma plays to sellout Bravo! crowd

Cellist opens Bravo! festival's season

By Chris Freud

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VAIL — It simply does not rain on Yo-Yo Ma.

And even if the skies opened, as they constantly appeared to be doing, it probably wouldn't have mattered to concertgoers attending the cellist's recital Friday night, which started the 23rd season of the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival at the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater.

"I don't care," said Julie Ackley-Black, of Louisville, Ky., who was sitting on the lawn of the amphitheater before the concert. "I'm this close to Yo-Yo Ma in the mountains. It can do whatever it wants. As long as his cello is dry, it's good."

A sellout crowd of 2,780 seemed to enjoy every minute of the much-anticipated concert as Ma and pianist Kathryn Stott received four standing ovations during the evening.

"Kathryn and I are so, so happy to be in this gorgeous community with beautiful mountains and great food," Ma said to the crowd before the second half of the program. "It's wonderful to play for you, and to you out on the lawn, thank you for braving it out."

Encore

Perhaps the most poignant moment of the concert came during the second encore of the evening when Ma invited the festival's artistic director and flutist Eugenia Zukerman onto the stage for a trio arrange-



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Yo-Yo Ma, left, performs with pianist Kathryn Stott, center, to a sold-out crowd at the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater on Friday night.

ment (with Stott) of "The Swan" from Saint-Saens' "Carnival of the Animals."

Ma and Zukerman have known each other for more than 30 years as musicians, and that friendship produced the cellist's appearance at Bravo! in Zukerman's 13th and final season with the festival.

The three had rehearsed the piece together, so the encore was planned, but Ma and Zukerman were clearly enjoying the moment, looking at each other during the final notes of the piece and afterward sharing a hug and bow.

"Eugenia playing at the end was lovely," said Dee Mulvihill, who lives in both St.

Louis and the Vail Valley and is a Bravo! regular. "I was surprised. It was a treat."

Ma takes the stage

Despite ominous skies, the crowd was definitely excited about Ma's appearance in Vail. The Ford Amphitheater was crowded early in a way generally reserved for New York Philharmonic concerts later in the festival.

"I've been trying to get tickets (for Yo-Yo Ma) down in Denver and they've always been sold out," said Eagle's Susan Baker after getting her ticket from will call. "So I was happy. With the lawn, I feel I can still



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Crowds anxiously await Yo-Yo Ma's performance Friday night at the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater in Vail. The crowds delayed the beginning of the program by 15 minutes.

see him."

And then Baker promptly went to the gates of the amphitheater to stake out a spot in the lawn seating, space which was becoming extremely difficult to find as the concert approached.

The will-call booth had its hands full with concertgoers, and the recital started 15 minutes late. Bravo! concerts, despite organizers' best efforts, rarely start at the appointed 6 p.m. time, and the delay didn't seem to disturb the crowd.

"I think it's very exciting," Vail's Alan Mintz said, after picking up his tickets for the entire season at will call. "We're certainly fortunate to have Yo-Yo Ma visit us here. But he's just one of many extraordinary artists we have."

Ma, dressed in an all-black suit, received a loud ovation after being presented by Zukerman, who joked, "Elvis is in the building,"

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and Bravo! executive director John Giovando. Ma and Stott immediately embarked on the first three pieces of the program, Ennio Morricone's "Gabriel's Oboe," Gershwin's "Prelude No. 2" and Cesar Carmargo Mariano's "Cristal," consecutively without interruption.

Ma and Stott concluded the first half of the program with Brahms' "Sonata No. 1," which drew a standing ovation before intermission. The two introduced the first piece after intermission, British composer's Graham Fitkin's "L." Stott said to the crowd that she had asked Fitkin to compose the piece for Ma's 50th birthday as a present to the cellist.

"Please make it incredible difficult," Stott joked, when recalling her conversation with Fitkin. "Let's

make him sweat."

Ma, now 54, gracefully played "L" — the Roman numeral 50 — with ease, and the two concluded with Rachmaninoff's "Sonata in G Minor," before sending the crowd home with two encores.

Bravo! continues today when Ma hosts "Imagination Celebration: Adventures in the Arts," at 9 a.m. at the Ford Amphitheater. It's a free concert geared toward introducing children to the world of classical music.

Bravo! begins its more-traditional symphonic form when the Dallas Symphony Orchestra opens its residency Wednesday at 6 p.m. with a concert including Barber's Violin Concerto and Beethoven's Fifth.

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