

Baroque brings balance

REVIEW

On Monday evening, the Pharos Trust opened their Winter 2006 season with an evening of Baroque music on period instruments, led by Japanese-born harpsichordist Naoki Kitaya.

The effects of classical music are well documented but there are also benefits to listening to Baroque music. Australian psychiatrist and musician Christian Heim led a study testing the effects of Baroque music which showed that composers such as Handel, Vivaldi, Bach, Corelli and Telemann produced alpha brain waves and a state of "calm, relaxed alertness".

The programme covered the works of Castello, Merula, Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Purcell, Caldara and Handel.

The ensemble began with Sofie Vanden Eynde and her theorbo which is a type of lute which was developed in Florence during the 1580s to accompany the voice. It is a very large instrument (around two metres) and is plucked and stopped on a fretted fingerboard like the strings of a guitar. The large size and the length of its bass strings gives it a powerful sound, especially in its bass register and in the PASYDY auditorium, Vanden Eynde produced a beautifully resonant tone. After a few bars, the rest of the group walked onto the stage to join her for Castello's *Sonata Quarta*.

During the evening, there were many combinations of players and the walking on and off the stage elicited a visual as well as aural experience.

Undoubtedly, the highlight of the evening for me was Vivaldi's *In furore justissimae irae* (In the fury of your righteous wrath you wield your sovereign power) with the Romanian soprano Teodora Gheorghiu, who incidentally is not related to Angela Gheorghiu.

Teodora Gheorghiu has a brilliant, bright voice – not usually associated with period

performance where a more natural, softer tone with less vibrato is the norm but it didn't deter from the performance. The motet is scored for soprano and strings and has very vibrant writing for strings and intensely florid vocal lines. Gheorghiu showed her accomplished technique and breath control although her diction was not always clear and there were some spots of intonation problems. The ensemble achieved a good dynamic range creating an exciting atmosphere. The other highlight was the final work, Handel's *Oreste* which was first presented in 1734 and is not really an "opera" but rather a pastiche put together by the composer himself for the cast who would star the following month in the newly composed *Ariodante*. Paramount to its success is an understanding of what constitutes Baroque style and the ability of the performers to negotiate the complicated vocal lines.

This was achieved by Gheorghiu who did not have difficulties with the rapid passagework or the smoother lines which required an even legato. She gave the work temperament with most of the top notes spot on. The ensemble was generally good, although there were quite a few 'wild' notes from violinist Igor Karsko who had a demanding role in all the works throughout the concert.

Although the concert was slightly long, it was an interesting evening although a strange choice in the middle of the Brazilian Month activities currently arranged by the Pharos Trust. The next concert is a song recital by Marina Poplavskaya and Julian Gallant on 18 November 2006. For further information: <http://www.thepharostrust.org>

By Saskia Constantinou





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