

Excellent Beethoven and Tchaikovsky - thank you, Pharos

The penultimate concert of the 8th International Pharos Chamber Music Festival was especially exciting because the attendance was particularly high in the beautiful setting in Kouklia.

The warmth in the hall was not only weather related. It stemmed too from the enthusiasm and reception of the audience to the high calibre of music-making we were privy to.

The programme began with one of the pinnacles of the piano trio literature - Beethoven's Piano Trio No 6 in B flat Op 97 - nicknamed the Archduke as it was dedicated to the youngest brother of Emperor Franz 11. The Archduke Rudolph von Habsburg was the most important and durable of Beethoven's many aristocratic Viennese patrons. It was performed by violinist Levon Chilingirian, cellist Christoph Richter and pianist Ashley Wass.

Wass, as we have seen throughout the festival, is particularly close to the Germanic composers and the majestic opening of the first movement had an almost symphonic spaciousness. He, together with his colleagues, retained the noble character of the work with a forceful interpretation and tight ensemble. The pianist has to play most of the time and Wass, as the engine of the performance, guided and gracefully shaped the rubati.

The Scherzo, unusually placed second in this work highlighted the tonal qualities of Richter, who also gave the trio section a graceful dance-like quality. Throughout the performance, the balance was excellent with all the combinations of instruments explored by the composer - violin solo, violin with cello, cello and piano - dynamically

exciting.

Possibly due to the heat, the intonation suffered somewhat towards the end of the final Allegro moderato which became rather frenzied.

The Tchaikovsky String Sextet in d minor received a standing ovation and calls for an encore. It was a powerful and commanding performance with violinists Ilya Gringolts, Alina Ibragimova, violists Diemut Poppen and Yuri Zhislin and cellists Alexander Chaushian and Aram Talalyan.

You would be forgiven if you thought that you were listening to the entire string section of a top orchestra from the rich sonority, uniformly precise intonation and feeling of warmth. This was true teamwork, with careful attention paid to bowing basics but also to subtlety of attack and similar stylistic approach. The high standard of playing, ambience and general organisation of the festival over the eight evenings has been exceptional. It is clear that the artists feel relaxed and comfortable, which naturally permeates throughout their playing. The audience loves the magic of the venue and the rather intimate atmosphere of the Royal Manor House. This is a musical event on the Cyprus calendar which is marked by international chamber music enthusiasts who attend. It seems tragic that this high calibre Festival is attended by very, very few local Greek speakers and seemingly not recognised or valued by the various tourist authorities as a huge marketing tool which could assist them in capturing a discerning visitor. One must be ever hopeful for next year.... Thank you Pharos.

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