

Uplifting Performance

The Pharos Arts Foundation presented the Hilliard Ensemble and the Chilingirian Quartet in their Holy Week concert which took place at Castelliotissa Hall in Nicosia on Tuesday evening.

The concert had a fantastic turnout with extra chairs quickly retrieved from the nearby hotel. The marketing and promotion of the concert was the same as other Pharos presentations, so it is an enigma as to why some performances are sold out and others not as well attended – possibly it was the programming?

The music presented was a first for Cyprus – Haydn's *Seven Last Words from the Cross Op 51* and the early 17th century Italian composer Carlo Gesualdo's *Responsoria in Parascève*. Gesualdo is better probably better known for his rather shocking private life – he murdered his first wife and her lover but could not be prosecuted by virtue of his noble status. He was plagued by guilt for the remainder of his life though, which is represented in his music which reflects extremes of emotion such as love, pain, death and agony.

The two works were not performed separately but interspersed one with the other. This was a novel concept with the music eminently suitable for this particular period of Easter and Lent. Haydn's *Seven Last Words* is an extensive work at almost an hour long, in seven sections which are all marked *Adagio* with a sermon on each of the words in-between. So, for a non liturgical service, breaking Haydn's string quartet arrangement with Gesualdo's polyphonic madrigals was effective.

The Chilingirian began with strong, martele strokes in a declamatory style more reminiscent of baroque music rather than Haydn. The intona-

tion was mostly secure with the quartet nicely balanced. The resonance and acoustics of the venue, coupled with subtle lighting and candles gave the concert a spiritual atmosphere. Although, the quartet has been playing as an ensemble for many many years which give them synergy, more dynamic shading and subtle attention to the phrasing and nuances would have further enhanced the reading of this work.

The Hilliard Ensemble comprises six men – two countertenors, two tenors and two baritones. Following the classical mould and harmonic structure of Haydn, the rather strident tonality and innovative harmonies of Gesualdo needed quick adjustment on the part of the listener. Although the Hilliard generally had secure intonation, with all the enunciation of the endings perfectly together, there were some rather strange notes in-between which suddenly seemed to resolve themselves. It was difficult to know whether these notes should be attributed to Gesualdo or if it was a case of a loss of ensemble.

The spiritual atmosphere created by the venue, music and musicians was unique and enjoyed by the audience. I do believe that the musical technicalities and finer aspects were not the crux of the matter in this concert but rather that the uplifting nature of the entire presentation made an impact, which it surely did.

The next Pharos concert features soprano Cleo Mitilineou and pianist Maria Antoniou Chimonidou in a programme of arias and songs by Bellini, Donizetti, Faure and Strauss as part of the Cyprus Artists Series on Wednesday April 29.

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