

Review

Music

National treasures

On Wednesday evening, soprano Cleo Mitilineou and pianist Maria Antoniou Chimonidou gave a recital at Castelliotissa hall in old Nicosia, as part of the Cyprus Artists Series organised by the Pharos Arts Foundation.

It was heartening to see the hall full. One of the most frustrating aspects of going to a concert in Cyprus is that the starting time is perpetually delayed, so it was most welcoming to hear the foundation's President, Garo Keheyan making an appeal to the public to please arrive on time.

He pointed out that this "abstract sense of time" which prevails in Cyprus will not pervade concerts by the Pharos, and as a form of respect to those who do arrive on time, doors will close, the programme will begin and latecomers will have to wait until the first applause. Bravo Pharos.

Cleo Mitilineou has been described as "one of the truest operatic treasures Cyprus has produced" with her performances praised by the international press. Since her graduation from the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest and her debut in 2001 as Juliette in Gounod's *Romeo and Juliette*, she has been singing leading roles with the Hungarian State Opera as well as other state companies.

The musically and technically challenging recital comprised ariettas and songs by Bellini, Donizetti, Faure, Strauss and Neophytos Stratis, which involved singing in four different languages. Mitilineou has a remarkable voice which is flexible and well controlled although her diction, particularly in the Bellini was not clear

which sometimes undermined the sense of drama. Her German in Strauss' songs was most successful where she also radiated some beautiful pianissimos in *Die Nacht*.

Although the recital could have had greater dynamic variety, this group of songs reflected her versatility and perfect breath control in the long, soaring phrases. The opening phrases of *Nichts* (Nothing) set the mood well for the exasperation of the words which followed.

Mitilineou has a warm stage presence, and is a confident performer. Some of the finer nuances and colouring of Faure's writing could have been emphasized more, but Mitilineou showed her affinity for drama in Faure's *Toujours* which is introduced by the piano. Chimonidou was a sensitive accompanist, kept a good balance and apart from a few occasions, was perceptive to Mitilineou's rubati. Neophytos Stratis' *Eros Anikate Maxan* and *Semelas* was given its world premiere at the recital. These are two songs based on Sophocles' text from *Antigone* and Euripides' text from *Bacchae* respectively. There was a distinct Middle Eastern essence in the songs which had a contemporary feel - hopefully we will hear more from this young composer who is presently furthering his studies in theatre at the Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting in New York City.

Cleo Mitilineou and Maria Antoniou Chimonidou gave us an evening of pleasure with their professional performance of repertoire not often heard. They also attracted a quite different audience to the usual crowd of Pharos supporters, whom we hope will attend other concerts too.

By Saskia Constantinou

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Παρασκευή, 1 Μαΐος 2009, p. 35

