

Ashley Wass plays a 'Liszt' of classics

The Pharos Arts Foundation's concert series presents performances of the highest calibre in the unique surroundings of the Shoe Factory in old Nicosia, and next week it will be no different as Pharos prepares to host a crowd favourite: Ashley Wass.

Local music fans will be familiar with the pianist due to his long-standing participation in the Pharos Chamber Music Festival. Described by *Gramophone Magazine* as "a thoroughbred who possesses the enviable gift to turn almost anything he plays into pure gold", Wass is recognised as one of the rising stars of his generation.

His watershed moment came in 1997 when he won the World Piano Competition in London. He then went on to become the only British pianist to have reached the final of the Leeds Piano Competition in the last 20 years.

Besides the exceedingly high quality of the performances that he has given ever since, what is most remarkable about Wass is the sheer number of critically acclaimed recordings of British music he has produced. The Naxos label went out of its way to make him its first exclusive artist in 2004. Since then, he has more than proved his worth, making a niche for himself in the Anglo-French corner with prime recordings.

A former BBC New Generation Artist, Wass has performed at some of the world's most prestigious concert halls and festivals, including the Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Bridgewater Hall, Vienna Konzerthaus and Carnegie Hall in New York. Furthermore, he has made several

appearances at the BBC Proms and even appeared in a gala concert at Buckingham Palace to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee which was broadcast live around the world. As well as a solo performer, Ashley is much in demand as a chamber musician and has already collaborated with some of the leading artists of his generation.

He began playing the piano at five, and studied music at Chethams Music School from age 11. In his teens he received a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Music, where his teachers included Christopher Elton and Hamish Milne. Wass later also studied with Murray Perahia and in 2002 he was made an Associate of the Royal Academy.

Wass loves to find new angles on repertoire, and though he has rapidly established a reputation as one of the great interpreters of British piano music of the last century, his sympathies and enthusiasms are unusually wide-ranging and his formidable technique and imagination find a match in the kaleidoscopic evocations by Liszt.

For Wednesday's recital, he will present the seldom-heard Liszt arrangement of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. In December 1880, Liszt attended the Rome première of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. Before the invention of sound recordings, piano versions of orchestral works offered the only way for many to discover the symphonic repertoire.

Liszt first transcribed Beethoven's Sixth Symphony for piano in 1838 and revised his score in the 1860s. The transcription, like Beethoven's own *32 Variations in C minor*





of 1806, (which also features in Wass' programme) evokes orchestral resonance from the keyboard, which will be brought to life by Wass. Also included in the programme is the *Sonata* by the great American composer Samuel Barber.

Ashley Wass

Pharos Arts Foundation hosts recital with acclaimed British pianist. November 14. The Shoe Factory, 304 Ermou Street, Nicosia. 8.30pm. €25/20. Tel: 22-663871/70-009304. www.pharosartsfoundation.org

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