

Two Pharos concerts

Beautiful Brahms

The fourth concert of the Seventh International Pharos Trust Chamber Music Festival took place in the magical setting of the Royal Manor House in Kouklia on Saturday night to a full house creating an exciting atmosphere for performers and audience alike.

Music Directors, Levon Chilingirian and Alex Chaushian have given a superb selection of works throughout the festival – no matter what particular groupings of instruments one prefers, there was something for everyone played by exemplary musicians. This concert had the distinction of featuring a flute quartet, violin and piano sonata and string quintet.

The programme began with an incredibly stylistic performance of Mozart's *Flute Quartet in D Major K285* with Sharon Bezaly, Christoph Poppen, Diemut Poppen and Alex Chaushian. Mozart finished the quartet, which was intended for private, intimate gatherings on December 25, 1777 – an atmosphere recreated for this performance. The blend of instruments, and particularly the strings was superb with the echo effects very well brought out through a diverse range of exaggerated forte and piano passages.

The Brahms *Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 2 in A major Op 100* which followed was a 'recording level' performance.

There seem to be insufficient adjectives to describe the extraordinary intensity and depth. Both violinist Christoph Poppen and pianist Philippe Cassard paid unswerving attention to the structures within the music which had an incredible build-up while communicating a variety of expressions. All the technical parameters were appar-

ent too – octaves which were perfectly tuned each and every time, just the right amount of *portamento* to be stylistically romantic but not excessive, lyrical playing from both pianist and violinist with an air of confidence and authority.

The final work, Mendelssohn's *String Quintet in A Major Op 18* was performed

by Levon Chilingirian, David Juritz, Diemut Poppen, Angela Giannaki and Alex Chaushian. The players blended fairly well with Giannaki ending the first movement arpeggio passage tastefully. Chilingirian began the second movement warmly, sul G and brought smiles to the audience with the clever and witty placement of the final pizzicato. The third movement fugato too began with a spicato played close to the string, although this developed over zealously into the final movement leading to some rather ragged playing.

Impeccable playing

The fifth concert on Sunday evening was also an astounding success.

The programme began with Hungarian Bela Bartok's *44 Duos for Two Violins* which were eloquently introduced by Chilingirian who played them with violinist Christoph Poppen.

These duos were written between 1930 and 1932. Bartok created a series of characteristic folk miniatures which convey his idiomatic Hungarian ethos. The selection chose by Chilingirian and Poppen was clever and witty and took us to a world of peasant dances, songs, antiphons and classical polyphony, all played with incredible charm and verve.

The highlight for me was Mendelssohn's *Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor Op 49* performed by Christoph Poppen, Ashley Wass and Alex Chaushian. From the first note, there was a warm fluency and an excellent interplay with a perfect focus from all the musicians throughout the work.

The *andante con moto tranquillo* gave Wass an opportunity to make the piano truly sing, which he did with a shimmering colour never clouded by over-peddalling. Poppen's violin and Chaushian's subsequent legato lines were long with a veritable array of colours achieved through a scintillating dynamic range.

The tempo of the *finale* was bright but had suitable breadth and rubato with Wass pushing hard in the runs and

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blocked chords but never losing clarity or shape and colour.

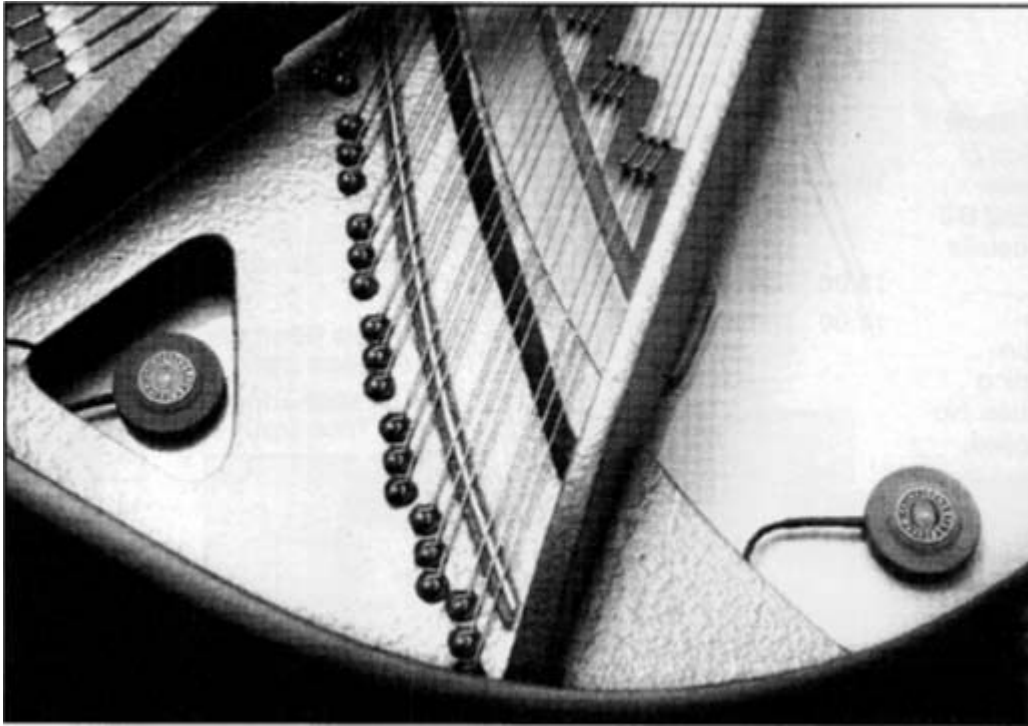
This, together with perfect ensemble and intonation from Poppen and Chaushian led to an impeccable rendition of a stunning work.

The final work was Faure's *Piano Quartet No. 1 in C Minor Op. 15* with Philippe Cassard, Levon Chilingirian, Angela Giannaki and Alex Chaushian. This was elegantly played but with the music's emotional sparks ever-present. The rhythmic off-beat chords

of the piano in the first movement gave Cassard the opportunity to really inaugurate the new Steinway grand acquired by the Pharos Trust and explore the lyric qualities in the *adagio* movement.

These were mirrored by the strings giving a shape and line to the phrasing with the fiery *finale* bringing the concert to a spirited close.

By Saskia Constantinou



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