

# BEHIND THE SCENES WITH MAHAN ESFAHANI

*Talking with Yvonne Georgiadou*



**This is your third time performing for Pharos. What is it that you like about Cyprus?**

Complete sincerity of people. People living the way they should live.

**Any particular places you want to visit this time?**

I am interested in the Byzantine heritage of the island and I want to visit the medieval castles and churches.

**Last year you participated in the Pharos Festival, and you collaborated for the first time with Michala Petri. Since then, you have appeared together in other European venues, got rave reviews and become close friends. What are your future plans together?**

Michala and I have already recorded a disc with the Corelli Op. 5 sonatas, and in October we are recording a second disc with works of the 20th and 21st centuries, and commissions by contemporary composers. It seems like we've known each other for ages, but we just met a year ago in Cyprus. If it were not for Pharos we wouldn't have done that.

**What about your recital this year? What inspired you to choose this particular, mainly Italian Baroque, programme?**

In principle, the fact that Cyprus has so many links with the crusaders, it has been greatly affected by the Venetian rule, so I decided to include some 16th century music.

**Italian, French or English Baroque then?**

J.S. Bach is my favourite composer but if I have to choose one genre, then Italian.

**But you don't just like Baroque, right?**

Oh I love Elgar. I also love Wagner, Haydn... Dvorak, Schoenberg. But for me, the big giant is Ligeti.

**Does music have a future?**

Yes.

**You really think so?..**

Absolutely, no question. Steve Reich has given a completely new life with his musical language.

**The greatest challenge on stage?**

I like to have the kind of audience member who is difficult to convince.

**Being an active musician...**

Is exciting because every day is absolutely different. Good or bad, it doesn't matter. It's a new experience. I love meeting people, speaking languages, tasting different food, visiting new places.

**Tell me about the not-so-good day. The most unpleasant experience.**

The most unpleasant experience...having to deal with people who gave me good reason to believe they had racial prejudice towards me. This is the worst feeling.

**Speaking of this, how do you confront those who just don't get your art?**

If they don't get my art, or any art in general, I just let them make fools of themselves. If, of course, I have a bad day performing that is absolutely my problem.

**Those who know you, know also that you have an amazing sense of humour. How useful do you think this is when you have to cope with stress or disappointments?**

I think we, Greeks, Persians, Mediterranean people in general, have been through a lot so we know how to make the most of it. We never felt the need to invade other countries to show our power. We are just expressive. Humour is part of our nature.

**What gives you pleasure besides performing?**

I like writing a lot, engaging with culture, learning new things. I also like to teach – not necessarily lessons, but I want to show people new things, share experiences.

**How do you relax after a concert?**

I am pretty relaxed before and after a concert. Before a concert I always read. After a concert I just sit and joke with my friends and have a glass of wine.

**The most influential / inspiring people in your music advancement and career.**

My father because he always followed through good and bad

**You have recently been shortlisted for the Royal Philharmonic Society Award for 2014. What was your immediate reaction?**

Disbelief.

**Will you believe it if you win it?**

If I win it, I will be humbled. But I will feel it is something big for the harpsichord too.

**Share with us a secret nobody knows:**

I used to be a violinist.