

Review

Bright Brahms

THE PHAROS Arts Foundation Winter Music Festival continued with a chamber concert on Thursday evening at the PASYDY Auditorium.

The concert began with Beethoven's youthful Trio for Clarinet, Cello and piano in B flat major with clarinetist Denitsa Laffchieva, pianist Katharina Treutler and cellist Alex Chaushian. Treutler gave a sparkling and supportive performance sensitive to her colleagues' musical phrases. The lyrical Adagio movement which is introduced by the cello, was mesmerising in its beauty – Chaushian plays with his soul and has a most gorgeous tone. The simplicity of the piano line was eloquently captured by Treutler with just the right touch of pedalling

before moving most expressively into the minor mode. The variations of the final movement were witty with the catchy dotted-rhythm variation sparkling before a nicely shaded coda. The Schumann Marchenerzahlungen with Laffchieva, violist Lise Berthaud and pianist Manolis Neophytou was not as successful. The two women chose to stand which proved to be very disruptive with Berthaud moving a lot. In this work, there is the additional challenge of balancing the piano sufficiently not to overwhelm the violin and clarinet – perhaps it should have had its lid on half-stick. These were three strong musical characters and the problems of ensemble, balance and direction did not settle.

The Fairy Stories (which must not be confused with his Fairy Tale Pictures which are positive, happy pictures) were written when Schumann was affected by his mental illness, and just prior to his two year creative silence before his death. The pervading mood of pessimism was missing. Brahms' last Piano Quartet in C minor Op 60 was written during difficult times with his close friend and patron Schumann having just attempted suicide and confined to an institution. Brahms rushed to help the family and found himself hopelessly in love with Schumann's wife, Clara. Although it was only completed 20 years later, this dramatic work is thought to be a testament of Brahms' devotion to Clara. This was the highlight of the programme played by violinist Catherine Leonard, violist Ylvali Zilliacus, cellist Alex Chaushian and pianist Katarina Treutler. The first movement suffered some ensemble difficulties primarily from bowing discrepancies between the violin and viola as well as some rather rough playing which felt as if it might veer out of control. However, the second movement Scherzo was heroically played with a much better blending and sense of musical line. Zilliacus is a fine viola player and played her dual role of having to match with violinist Leonard and cellist Chaushian well. The 3rd movement opening was searing in its intensity with Chaushian and Treutler perfectly integrated. Treutler gave the final movement its atmosphere of general restlessness driving it to an exciting conclusion. An interesting and balanced programme.

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