

# Majestic vocals

The Pharos Trust Autumn/Winter season continued with a song recital by Russian soprano Marina Poplavskaya and English pianist Julian Gallant at the PASYDY Auditorium on Saturday night. The programme began with Ravel's *Cinq Melodies Populaires Grecques*, whose vocal line had a Russian rather than French feel to it. The nuances that are so typical of Ravel's music were missing and it was very difficult to discern what language Poplavskaya was actually singing in.

However, the rest of the evening, devoted to Rachmaninov and Shostakovich was breathtakingly beautiful.

Rachmaninov's songs are written in a lyric tradition with brilliant pianism – brilliant in display as well as in expressive eloquence.

The Rachmaninov *Six Songs Op. 38* were sung with great intensity, the voice always steady with a tight and emotive vibrato. The factor that made the greatest impact was her clear understanding and depth of emotion and belief in what she was singing. She acted the words and was emotionally combustible generating an exciting visual as well as aural slant to this work.

Her accompanist should rather be titled partner – Julian Gallant always ever-present in a fiendishly difficult piano part from all perspectives. The balance (with a closed piano) was excellent, and he never overshadowed Poplavskaya.

His incredible rhythmic sense gave her the freedom the songs require while the oscillation between the percussive and cantabile touch of the piano was excellent with the pedalling perfectly controlled.

Following the short interval, was Shostakovich's *Satires Op 109* which dates from 1960 and is set around the words of a well known pre-revolutionary





satirist Sasha Chorny. The work was dedicated to Galina Pavlovna Vishnevskaya, (wife of the legendary cellist Mstislav Rostropovich) who was the first to perform them in February 1961 in the Moscow Conservatoire.

Black humour is obviously prevalent in *Satires*, which are scathing social commentaries written with the composer's customary sharpness.

Poplavskaya again demonstrated her intimate appreciation of these songs and performed them with vivid imagination and drama which was much appreciated by the audience.

The diction – needed for the intricate lyrics – in her native Russian was excellent with the well-researched programme notes by Yvonne Georgiadou complete with translations of all the songs, assisting in our understanding of what was being sung.

There was verve and thrilling tension around these songs with her interpretation of Shostakovich's intentions clearly stated. Her rapport with pianist Julian Gallant was ubiquitous and he too gave these songs their satiric quality with excellent dynamics and strong rhythmic sense. The final song *Kreitserova Sonata (Kreutzer Sonata)* was undoubtedly the masterpiece of the set and was sung with chilling propinquity and emotional shading by Poplavskaya. We were treated to two encores which brought an end to this exciting recital. I would love to see her back soon, with a programme of opera arias. The next Pharos event is a week dedicated to the music of Yiannis Xenakis which begins with a concert on December 1. Visit <http://www.thepharostrust.org>

*By Saskia Constantinou*

