

REVIEW

The Pharos Trust's final concert for 2006 was a performance by the Polish Szymanowski Quartet at the PASYDY Auditorium in Nicosia on Thursday night.

The Quartet formed in 1995 and following many awards at international competitions and festivals, has developed into one of the most charismatic string quartets of the younger generation.

As part of the Pharos Education Programme, several schools were privileged to hear the quartet in the morning explaining and bringing to life the works which were performed in the evening.

The concert began with President of the Pharos Trust, Garo Keheyan welcoming all and announcing the success of the Pharos Trust Wigmore Hall concert in London which was sold out.

The Trust will set up a charity within the following few months with more concerts to follow. Those who weren't in London will have the opportunity to hear cellist Alex Chaushian and British pianist Ashley Wass in Nicosia on January 24.

The first work on the programme was Haydn's *String Quartet in F Major Op 77*, his last and written when he was 70. The Szymanowski played stylistically showing a high standard of ensemble with excellent communication between them. The years of performing together have led to refined playing with the quartet almost breathing together.

The three modern instruments blended well with the Strad of the first violinist Andrew Bielow. The accents and dynamics of the Menuetto were very effective with the oscillation of the short and long notes together with subito piano, quite electric. The andante movement highlighted the technical facility of Bielow with his sparkling semiquaver passages, dotted with trills and a well sustained spiccato in the lower half of the bow, never losing refinement. Shostakovich stands on a particular pin-

nacle alongside Haydn (and Mozart and Beethoven) as they are the only composers to have achieved equal success in symphonies and string quartets. But, the 15 quartets of Shostakovich have had a more difficult time to establish their place in the repertory than their forerunners. Shostakovich's quartets were written between 1938 and 1974 and are a kind of private diary, a personal testimony of a composer who witnessed World War 11, the Stalin era, the Cold War and the stagnation under Brezhnev.

The Szymanowski however, understand the volatile music of Shostakovich and gave a deeply emotional reading of the *String Quartet No 8 in C Minor, Op 110*, which was technically of the highest order. The rich and dark sonorities were well sustained throughout with the intense vibrato creating a beautiful sound. The sarcasm, wit and self-mockery of Shostakovich came through clearly in the waltz making those qualities truly sound like Shostakovich. The combined mixture of gloom, desperation, energy and exhilaration of this music was given a rapt and compelling performance.

The concert closed with Schubert's *String Quartet No 15 In G Major* again highlighting the individual character of each member's playing. The solo cello opening of the *Andante Un Poco Moto* was full of warmth and musical phrasing with drama and colour in the sound. Each player has a fine technique and together married a warmly romantic intensity with balance of shape. A tight and skilled performance with precision of ensemble, intonation, dynamic range coupled with strong interpretive abilities. A fitting conclusion to a great year of concerts from the Pharos Trust and many thanks must go to them.

By Saskia Constantinou

Fine Pharos finale

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Szymanowski Quartet, December 14, PASYDY Auditorium, Nicosia



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