

## REVIEW

Zehetmair Quartet, March 3, PASYDY Auditorium, Nicosia

# Zehetmair Quartet

THE Pharos Trust again regaled the music-loving public by bringing the Zehetmair Quartet to Nicosia last Friday night.

The previous day, the quartet had given a concert for schoolchildren as part of the fervent commitment to education that is integral to the Pharos Trust philosophy. With over 5 000 children exposed to these educational series so far, it's a pity that the Pharos Trust are not financially assisted by the Ministry of Education and Culture in this scheme. I didn't expect to see a large audience as it was a long weekend, and the concert contained two of the founders of modernism – Paul

Hindemith and Bela Bartok on the programme, but it was a performance which sizzled with vitality, enjoyed by those who attended.

Of the four founders of modernism (the others being Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Bartok), Hindemith was arguably the most scholarly and intellectual in temperament. He was not only a composer but also a conductor, violist, educator and theoretician. His academic interests were deep and wide-ranging and included mediaeval philosophy and the writings of the early Church, as well as musical topics. Where Stravinsky worked variations primarily on Mozart, Hindemith looked

more to Bach hence the chorale "Vor Deinen Thron tret ich hiermit" BWV 668a which began the programme. It was played stylistically in keeping with period instruments, but I personally did not like the lack of vibrato or the quality of sound, particularly that of the second violin which was rather harsh and nasal. With the *f-holes* facing away from the audience, it was rather disturbing to have only a side view as he stood opposite the first violinist. The Bach was curiously followed attacca by Hindemith's "String Quartet No 4 Op 22".

Here, the quality of sound, the ensemble and the in-

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tonation were all excellent. The quartet is clearly highly intellectual and practised in what they want to achieve, and the means of how to achieve it. What was most exemplary was the fact that the Zehetmair Quartet play entirely from memory. This is an incredible feat as it means that not only have they mastered their own parts, but also those of the rest of the quartet allowing them to concentrate on each other rather than the score. This total commitment to each score results in maximum impact musically. The Bartok String Quartet No 5 followed the interval with its hardness of tonal language. Even as a musician, I am not

an ardent fan of Bartok – I believe that I haven't heard his works sufficiently, with the exception of his Viola Concerto which is marvelous after repeated hearings. But, the Zehetmair Quartet changed my outlook. They gave an outstanding performance which thrilled even this jaded critic! Although a young quartet, they have quickly risen through the ranks of the world's ensembles and won awards for their Bartok recordings. The rhythms of the first movement had drive and an almost savage determination and were full of vitality. The second movement, a despairing and mournful song was beautifully executed

with brilliant pianissimos at the end. The finale in contrast, was full of courage and energy. The melodic figures which are borrowed from folk music form the foundation of the whole movement. The entire quartet gave their performance rhythmic pungency and bite with great control and clarity with the ensemble taking all the opportunities to show their fire and depth.

Next concert: Grigory Sokolov  
Friday 10 March, Pasydy Auditorium. 8.30pm  
Tel: 22-663871 or  
<http://www.thepharostrust.org>

*By Saskia Constantinou*



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