

International Music Festival in Lucerne

It was feared that the appeal of the International Music Festival would wane somewhat after its brilliant start and that the audience's enthusiasm would subside. However, even at the fourth and fifth concerts, a festive and joyful crowd thronged the hall, tirelessly celebrating the artists with thunderous applause.

The strong turnout for the chamber music evening was particularly gratifying, especially considering the program was geared more towards connoisseurs and enthusiasts. Listeners were also in for a special treat: the Busch Quartet had rarely played with such mastery or found such an equal partner as in the English clarinetist Reginald Kell. What magnificent musicianship, what ideal interplay! Their artistry was showcased in two works that are all too rarely heard: Mozart's Clarinet Quintet in A major (K. V. 581), written in 1789 for his somewhat dubious friend, the Viennese court musician Anton Stadler, and Brahms's Clarinet Quintet in B minor, Op. 115, which was also dedicated to an outstanding clarinetist, the Meiningen chamber musician Richard Mühlfeld, and which he premiered in 1891 with the Joachim Quartet. A world of difference lies between these two compositions: between Mozart's singing, ringing music, filled with inner light, whose melodies the instruments play back and forth, and the expressive and tension-filled music of melancholy overshadowed Brahms' music, which deeply moves us. The listeners listened reverently to the playing of the strings and the singing of the clarinet, and enthusiastically cheered the musicians.

As is rarely the case at a music festival, Lucerne offers the opportunity to see the great conductors "at work" and to observe how the orchestra, this ensemble of magnificent musicians, merges into a unified whole under their hands, how inhibitions are overcome and contrasts are balanced. One unleashes it to the highest crescendos, another trains it to flare dynamic and tonal contrasts, a third insists on the loving refinement of detail. Ernest Ansermet, in particular, the conductor of the fourth symphony concert, did valuable work here and loosened the orchestra to a rigorous degree. The interesting, organically structured program contrasted two related works of the Classical period with characteristic scores of the Late Romantic and Impressionist periods. The very first piece, Haydn's fifth of the "Paris Symphonies" in D major, and especially its light and spirited finale, determined the success of the concert. But Ansermet, an interpreter of French music with few equals, offered his masterpiece with his transparent, subtly nuanced performance of Debussy's first two Nocturnes, "Nuages" and "Fêtes," and Ravel's effective, rhythmically vibrant dance poem, "La Valse." Heartfelt, sustained applause thanked the outstanding conductor from Gens and co-creator of the Lucerne Festival, who once again demonstrated his culture and his passion with this captivating concert.

The evening's great soloist, Sergei Rachmaninoff, whom the people of Lucerne consider one of their own and who selflessly made himself available for the festival, received an equally warm welcome. Admirable is the astounding ease of his technique, the enchantingly delicate touch, and the transparency of his performance. Although he may be more of a Chopin than a Beethoven player, he nevertheless gave a very beautiful, spiritual interpretation of the Piano Concerto in C major, Op. 15, which he followed in the second part of the evening—his own and also his best interpreter—with his Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 43. However assured and varied the compositional work of these twenty-four variations on a theme by Paganini, however undeniable the expressive qualities of the music—for example, in the Tempo di Minuetto (Var. 12), the Andante cantabile (Var. 18), or in the sharply rhythmic surge of individual Allegro movements—this arabesque-rich, often quite verbose virtuoso piece nevertheless belongs to a bygone era and can only be effective through the brilliance of

its performance. Not entirely without justification, we now tend to value the pianist Rachmaninoff more highly than the composer, who, in some ways, sacrifices too much to the virtuoso. But such reservations carried little weight on this occasion; the popular master of the piano, who, despite his refined reserve, had won the hearts of the masses, was honoured with thunderous ovations.

Diversity at the highest quality – that is the hallmark of the Lucerne Music Weeks.

[Translation: Google]