

November 19, 2010

## Vignettes from Vienna



The Hindu

IN SYNC: An arresting performance by Trio Imàge. Photo: K. Pichumani

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You greet a balmy evening hinting of rain with either escape or embrace. Stay home and dream, or head out to hear the Berlin-based Trio Imàge play chamber music in two different major keys at *The Hindu* Friday Review November Fest.

Chamber music is intimate, written as it is for exclusive, aristocratic audiences, with a conversational character that predictably brings forward alternative points of view. Blend is an essential aspect, especially when three star soloists perform together. On day four of the Fest, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms were served stirred not shaken in an arresting performance by Trio Imàge, comprising dynamic, young musicians, Gergana Gergova on the violin, Thomas Kaufmann on the cello and Pavlin Nechev on the piano. The trio has performed together since 2007 and its members are, at present, students of the Hanns Eisler Hochschule in Berlin.

They were to perform three intricate compositions — Mozart's Piano Trio in C Major, Beethoven's Piano Trio in E Flat Major and Brahms Piano Trio in C Major (the first two were composed in Vienna) — but it seemed a pleasant evening of music-making by friends at ease with each other who wanted to share with the audience the cherished masterpieces they loved playing. Their performance was a perfect marriage of mannerism and music — Nechev's aristocratic pianism merged well with Gergova's spirited rendition and Kaufmann's soulful bowing on his amber-shaded, antique Angelo Radrizzani cello.

Mozart's piano trio opened in grand unison, a theme very similar to his 'Marriage of Figaro'. Nechev's warm, honeyed tone was a fine counterpoint to Gergova's lightness of spirit, and since part of the charm of chamber music is to return the compliment of another player with ease, Kaufmann adapted his cello in places to match Gergova's. The second movement, similar to an operatic aria, had the piano singing the melody, with the cello echoing the violin's motifs. The joyful rondo of the final movement had the cello taking the lead with graded, accurate staccato playing.

### **Taking the lead**

The trio opened Beethoven's piece with a scholarly treatment of the tonal system. The scherzo followed the traditional pattern of repetition, with the piano and cello taking the lead. The violin offered flawless precision steering the trio with a subtle touch in the beautiful second movement and a well-balanced tone in the humorous fourth movement.

For all their sophistication and genius, Brahms' trios are a tough act given that the music often tends to border on the brooding. But, it was to the trio's credit that his craftsmanship was showcased with intense energy in the passages where Brahms' expands, varies and transforms his music. The violin and the cello employed abundant strength to bring a textual transparency while the piano added a range of moods and dynamics. The strings underlined the muscularity of the operatic movement with a gypsy-like Hungarian melody. This was followed by a dark scherzo which lightened up in no time demanding delicacy and control from all three members, particularly the pianist before the piece ended with a monumental flourish.

It is a good feeling when the audience knows it has been enchanted by a performance from young musicians who are inevitably on the road to fame. Trio Imàge's performance had individual incision, mutuality of gesture, lyrical quality and a lightness of being. Much like the music and the times it was written in. And, much like a walk in Viennese woods on a balmy evening.