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Best of three worlds



The Hindu

Anil Srinivasan (right), Sharik Hasan (center) and Alexandra Minoza at the Pianos for Peace concert held at Goethe Institut Auditorium. Photo: B.Jothi Ramalingam

Genre-hopping was the musical order of the day at the grand finale of the week-long Fete de La Musique

A hush fell over the crowded auditorium at the Goethe Institut. The rhythmic wave of countless hand fans was replaced by the sweet notes of the Steinway piano as Claude Debussy's melody permeated the night of the summer solstice like clouds of perfumed incense. It was the grand finale of the fourth edition of the Fete de la Musique and the concert, Pianos For Peace, brought together perhaps for the first time in India three pianists representing three different streams of music — Anil Srinivasan (Indian Contemporary), Sharik Hasan (Jazz) and Alexandra Minoza (Western Classical).

The Fete de la Musique, organised by various cultural missions in the city — Alliance Française de Madras, Goethe Institut, InKo Centre, Rhapsody-Education Through Music, KM Conservatory and Musee Musical — was a citywide event, deliberately and charmingly heterogeneous. The only common aesthetic running through the festival's programmes was to bring the healing power of music to as many people as possible.

The Philippines-born, Chennai-based Alexandra Minoza took the stage first. An accomplished pianist of the Suzuki movement who plays anything classical from Bach to Prokofiev, Alexandra

holds degrees in music from Universities in Singapore and the U.K. A member of the faculty at KM Conservatory, she set the concert off to a daring start with Debussy's masterpiece, 'Clair de Lune', the third and most famous movement of his *Suite Bergamasque*. Inventive playing, aided by the composition's watery textures and diaphanous orchestration, made this a richly chromatic piece. Alexandra followed this up with Frederic Chopin's 'Ballade No.1' in yet another beautiful harmonic language. Fluid dissonances, imaginative colours that unfolded at dramatic speed and rich timbre... Alexandra surmounted the challenges of one of the most difficult of Chopin's pieces with the ace of a professional.

Sharik Hasan, who has been a pianist since he was five, took the Jazz route to fame at the concert with two pieces — Antonio Carlos Jobim's 'Jobim Suite' and his own composition 'Jack O' Lantern Jig'. The New York-based pianist who has studied at the renowned Longy School of Music, U.S., is so skilful a musician that he ended up winning a host of scholarships offered by the Royal School of Music, London, and Trinity College of Music, Cambridge, by the age of 16. Very much in love with Jazz, Sharik's music hovered over the atonic passages, lending them shimmer and style. The first piece by the Brazilian composer Jobim is a jazz standard with soft chords and fragmented themes. Sharik segued it into his own composition, dark in certain passages, light in others, to play winding notes that ran the length of the keyboard. The exploration was set off by pounding rhythms, sharp chords and rolling riffs. He rounded off his part with a George Gershwin classic.

Well-known city-based pianist Anil Srinivasan, who has honed his extraordinary pianism at the University of Southern California and Columbia University, New York, performed next. Anil, who is noted for bridging old and new music, and cross-referencing the classical with the popular, opened on the Yamaha piano with a mix of 'Summertime' and 'Malarthum Malaratha'. Gershwin's classic flowed with its sweep into the familiar song from the Tamil hit film, *Paasa Malar*. At the peak of the melody, the line took a plaintive turn and the force of the clashing chords, signifying sounds so distinctively East and West, blended into one.

The next piece brought together Chopin's 'Nocturne Op. 37 No.1', a decorative composition with the beauty of a poem, and 'Chithiram Pesuthadi', immortalised in a song from the Tamil film *Sabash Meena*. It was an exercise in exploration — the music, flush with crystal notes and melodic harmonies. Anil ended his rhapsodic performance with a Dhanashri thillana, a complex score that began as a mellow dance but ended with chord bursts.

And then, over the next half hour, the trio mixed and matched tunes, playing thumping octaves and smooth arpeggios with equal aplomb. Sharik's composition, 'Waltz for Peach' throbbed with Ilaiyaraaja's notes and warm sounds from the jazz standard, 'Sunny Side of the Street' played by Anil. Sting's sensuous 'Fields of Gold' met the poignant strings of Cyndi Lauper's 'Time After Time'. And it ended with 'Vande Mataram' and Robert Schumann's 'Kinderszenen' (Scenes from Childhood), achingly beautiful, dedicated to 'Foreign Lands and People', here on this stage where all worlds came together.