



Highest Accolades

*GERALD FENECH enjoys his visit
to Festival Maribor in Slovenia*

I had not been to Maribor for a few years although it is a city which I know quite well and which is replete with cultural variety and a throbbing sense of vibrancy. Maribor holds an annual festival of classical music which is diverse and eclectic and this year's [5-13 September 2013] was no exception. Although the theme of 'Less is More' mirrored the economic difficulties through which the country is passing at this present time, the end result certainly demonstrated that quality was not in any way compromised.

This time round, the participating orchestra was the Chamber Orchestra of the Comic Opera Berlin and they brought a bluff vibrancy to proceedings. The first concert featured a variety of composers ranging from Mendelssohn to Schreker and one could but admire the prowess of soloist Gabriel Adorján who played the solo part in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto to perfection. I also enjoyed the Schreker pieces which were played with alacrity whilst the Sibelius works including *Valse Triste* were also winningly done.



Maribor. Photo © 2013 Gerald Fenech. Click on the image for higher resolution

The next concert was interestingly innovative and featured a silent film by Friedrich Murnau called *The Last Laugh* with the orchestra playing the accompaniment live on stage. Franz Strobel conducted a fiery and passionate account of the score which fairly leapt from the pages.

The chamber concert, *Between Joy and Misery*, featured the famous *Arpeggione* sonata by Schubert, the Trio D 898 by the same composer and Debussy's Violin Sonata in G minor. Christian Schmidt and Lily Francis played their solo parts with zeal and Reinhard Latzko proved to be a most sympathetic cellist.

Sunday 8 September saw the concert move to the lovely medieval walled city of Ptuj just outside Maribor.



Ptuj. Photo © 2013 Gerald Fenech. Click on the image for higher resolution

Here the ensemble 'La Capricciosa' played a varied number of works by a variety of composers from the Italian Renaissance ranging from Marco Uccellini and Tarquinio Merula to Vivaldi. I greatly enjoyed these beautiful works which came alive in the wonderful ambience of Ptuj Castle.



La Capricciosa in Ptuj Castle. Photo © 2013 Gerald Fenech. Click on the image for higher resolution

The pilgrimage continued on Monday when the festival went to Graz just across the Austrian border for the evening, for a chamber concert in the

Congress Graz Music Hall. The programme consisted of works by Heinrich von Herzogenberg, Benjamin Britten and Johannes Brahms. Herzogenberg's Trio Op 61 was quite intriguing although a little reticent in experimentation. Oboist Dudu Carmel was a persuasive advocate with Boštjan Lipovšek also very virtuosic in his horn playing. Britten's *Temporal Variations* was the next work on the programme and was despatched with elan by Carmel and his accompanists. The second part of the programme was taken up by the Trio for horn, violin and piano Op 40 by Johannes Brahms, which was quite brilliantly played by Lipovšek, Janez Podlesek on violin and Rok Palčič on the piano.

The final symphonic concert on the menu was dedicated to Mozart, Wagner and Mendelssohn with the Berlin Comic Opera Orchestra in full swing. First off was the *Prague* Symphony by Mozart, No 38, which was despatched with aplomb by Henrik Nánási who directed with panache and style. Wagner's anachronistic *Siegfried Idyll* followed next, slow perhaps but slightly on the sugary side too.

Finally there was a Mendelssohn *Italian* Symphony which rounded off proceedings quite superbly. This is a festival which I will always enjoy attending since I am always made at home by the organisers, a lively bunch of talented music lovers who surely deserve the highest accolades.

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