

## Music

# An ambitious effort that delighted

Silvio John Camilleri reviews world and Maltese premieres during the Double Bass and Piano Recital at the International Spring Orchestra Festival.

My journey in radio broadcasting started around 13 years ago; tending to emphasise modern and contemporary classical music, I found myself airing works of composers who were seldom featured in local concerts.

Matters have changed since then, owing to the input of overseas-based musicians of Maltese origin, coupled with a tendency for performers and organisers to embrace more contemporary idioms. The Double Bass and Piano Recital held last week at Sala Isouard was a case in point. The event formed part of the 7th International Spring Orchestra Festival, organised by Karl Fiorini, and it included four world premieres, and the first Maltese rendition of two other works.

The interpreters were the double bass player Gjorgji Cincievski and pianist Tricia Dawn Williams. Concert-goers nowadays associate Williams with the interpretation of composers such as Bartók and Cowell. Cincievski's repertoire is equally inquisitive and, although not confined to any specific period, he is particularly fond of the romantic era. The unusual coupling of double bass and piano gave rise to interesting sonorities, owing to their contrasting timbres.



Pianist Tricia Dawn Williams and double bassist Gjorgji Cincievski.  
Photo: Brian Galea

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The opening work was the world premiere of *Tremor* by Australian composer Douglas Knehans. The title alludes to the muscular effort entailed by the interpreters, who have to grapple with faster sections, and expose the lyrical qualities of the slower ones.

Right from the first *forte pizzicato* note, Cincievski showcased the melancholic qualities of the double bass and Williams' clear interpretation struck a delicate balance between the forceful rhythmic parts and the more subdued ones. Cincievski sounded particularly at ease, especially in the effortless execution of the pizzicatos in the final crescendo.

The second item was the world premiere for *Sign of Spring* composed in 2012 by Man-Ching Yu. Born in Hong Kong, this composer is frequently inspired by paintings. The work is tinged with an Oriental touch, which intermingles with impressionistic,

Western elements; a bit like a Toru Takemitsu composition. Williams sounded particularly assertive in the more abstract sections of the work where some passages are fairly demanding. Cincievski offered an interesting complementary role throughout the recurring *glissandi*, *tremoli* and *pizzicati*.

Next in line was the first local performance of *Capriccio in E for Double Bass* by Miloslav Gajdoš. Born in Moravia in 1943, Gajdoš composed a series of *Capriccios* that are noteworthy for their inventive qualities. *Capriccio in E* is structured in a fast-slow-fast format and it is inspired by Czech folk tunes. In his typical style, Cincievski immersed himself in the work. Without attempting any undue excesses he tackled the challenge of prestissimo playing, and sounded even better in the more subdued passages.

Tricia Dawn Williams' solo was the first local performance of *Suite Caféinée* by French composer Pierre-Adrien Charpy. The 11 movements comprising this work vary substantially in mood; while this adds to the appeal of the suite, it requires the performer to adapt successively over short periods of time.

The suite is a *tour de force* of dance-like passages with ostinatos and staccato rhythms, even if the melodic qualities are consistently at the fore. Williams rose to the

occasion and rendered a convincing execution which was also lauded by the composer. She integrated the complementary roles of the melody and rhythms; particularly during the third, fifth and the final movements.

I could discern subtle changes in Williams' interpretation on the actual night, as compared to her teaser online uploads of previous approaches; perhaps following her encounter with the composer on the performance eve.

The fifth composition was the world premiere of *Paradoxapo* by Maltese composer Mauro Farrugia. Aged 23, Farrugia has already penned a considerable number of works and this is his third major composition to receive a public performance.

*Paradoxapo* is intended as an irony on the *da capo* form, where listeners are deceived into expecting particular musical developments which are then negated. This idea is complemented by the asymmetric structure of the work. The composition starts on a meditative mood accentuated by short pauses which suggest bare spaces, reminding me of some of Charles Camilleri's abstract compositions.

Tempo picks up in the second section where fascinating double bass techniques were complemented by Williams' lively rendition of staccato-like passages. Cincievski's

playing sounded particularly emotional in the final part, where the vibratos evoked the haunting atmosphere of Muezzin chants.

The concert concluded with the world premiere of *Introduction and the Tin's Dance* by Macedonian composer Damjan Temkov. The principal themes are a Balkan love song and a traditional folkdance in 10/8 time which are juxtaposed in counterpoint.

The chemistry between the interpreters was particularly evident in the first part. The use of the double bass as a percussion instrument highlighted the folk and jazzy reminiscences of the piece and Cincievski enriched the interpretation with an improvised cadenza. It was also one of the moments where Williams revealed her occasional softer approach to piano-playing.

Devoting the entire recital to new compositions proved an ambitious effort which paid off handsomely. The performances were not only enjoyed by the interpreters, but also by the audience, leaving most people on the lookout for future activities by the protagonists.

Cincievski's schedule includes premieres of his transcriptions for trios by Johannes Brahms and Joseph Vella, while Williams' comprises a solo recital at the Béla Bartók Memorial House in Budapest, and the premiere of a work by Ruben Zahra.