



Specatacular “Kosmos” concert at Kilmory.

10th March 2012

Since 2005, when “Kosmos” had its baptism of fire performing live on Greek national television at a major festival on Hydra, this wonderful String Trio has performed to great acclaim all over Europe, and last Saturday was the turn of Mid Argyll to host the Ensemble, fresh from Skye and Bute and en route for Cowal and Kintyre. An expectant audience, with not an empty seat in the Kilmory Council Chamber welcomed Harriet Mackenzie (violin), Meg Hamilton (viola) and Shirley Smart (cello), and there followed one of the most enthralling and captivating nights of music ever staged by the ABCT and MAAA.

“Kosmos”, an innovative and quite unique String Trio, perform their own arrangements, compositions and improvisations, and at this concert, music from more than a dozen countries was featured - Greece, Argentina, Israel, Poland, Spain, Bulgaria, Iraq, Tunisia, Turkey, Russia, Egypt, Brazil....

In the course of 100 magical minutes, fifteen different scenarios were introduced and performed, exhibiting Balkan, Arabic, Klezmer, Tango, Gypsy, Russian and Greek folk music among others.

An informative programme was provided in advance, and this, plus the engaging introduction to each set given in turn by the three artistes rapidly spread an increased understanding of and liking for this hitherto foreign music – the applause after each number was enthusiastic and prolonged.

“Kosmos” played without music and Harriet and Meg (in striking colours) stood throughout, flanking seated cellist Shirley (in black with silver sequin top). The close understanding between the Trio members shone out over and over again, as themes were tossed one to another and violin, viola and cello took it in turns to play solo, in unison and in harmony.

In the centre, the role of the cello was vital – at times a guitar, then a walking double bass, plucked strings and bow constantly interchanging, with Shirley’s relaxed rhythmic playing fascinating to behold. The cello provided the

necessary stability and sonority for the Trio, permitting the virtuoso playing of the violin (Harriet) and the viola (Meg) to take the eager audience on a musical journey few had ever encountered before.

Lively, passionate, poignant, serene, mesmerising....words are inadequate to convey the magic of the playing. The musical arrangements, compositions and improvisations flowed, all very different and unique, yet strangely linked together by the unifying feature of being played in a minor key.

It is impossible to single out any one performance, Piazzolla's "Libertango" though was really special and the Greek and Klezmer items were particularly memorable. My neighbour, an experienced string player herself, felt that this music, so expertly played, was bringing out sounds from the instruments she had never heard before - certainly so in the finale, which featured mesmerising birdsong, inspired initially by "the lark ascending", then moving on to more bovine contributions from the viola. Occasionally, Kosmos moved into the familiar idiom of classical music – snatches of Bach, Brahms, Saint-Saens were tantalisingly introduced - before reverting to the music of the East.

The virtuoso playing of Kosmos was quite exceptional - passionate yet always refined and controlled - and the unique programme presented by Harriet, Meg and Shirley for this ABCT tour broke new ground and will long be remembered.

JBH
