

Reviews

A formidable performing duo

Emilio Colon and
Nariaki Suguria
Manoel Theatre

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PRESENTED in collaboration with the American Embassy, the performance by cellist Emilio Colon and pianist Nariaki Suguria held at the Manoel Theatre ranked among the best in the field of chamber music that we have had this season. It provided the opportunity to share the talents of one of America's premier cellists with music lovers in Malta in an exciting programme featuring classical and Latin American

pieces. It was a pity that the recital was not too well attended – musicians of such calibre should have drawn a full house.

It seems to reflect rather sadly a comparative inability to fully appreciate the genre on the part of the concert-going Maltese public, perhaps because it requires a more acute level of concentration. This situation needs to be addressed for unfulfilled theatres ultimately reflect gaps in our musical formation and in the end we are the losers. Nonetheless those who were fortunate enough to be there were more than rewarded for their efforts.

Two marvellous sonatas featured in the first half of the programme: Debussy's swan song, his Sonata for Cello and Piano in D Minor and Rachmaninov's Sonata in G Minor Opus 19.

It was obvious from the opening notes that the pianist was not only going to assume the role merely of accompanist, but in fact dialogued with the cellist throughout.

Emilio Colon launched Rachmaninov's Sonata in G Minor Opus 19 with a very expressive tender yearning opening, which then unfolded with the pianist into a passionate combination of heart-rending plaintive melancholy and dazzling virtuosity throughout. The piano came into its own particularly in the *andante*, the third movement (typically of sonatas of the Romantic period, this sonata is in four movements), while in the final *allegro mosso*, the sonata came to a triumphantly jubilant climax in an unabashed lyricism.

Debussy's Sonata for Cello and Piano in D Minor is technically

very demanding; a mixture of lyricism and humour, mystery and irony, it reflects a wide range of colours and timbres and makes use of a wide gamut of extended cello techniques which evoked an impressionistic quality typical of Debussy's style but rather rare for the cello.

The second part of the programme further portrayed the versatility of the musicians who were equally at home with Hispanic and Latin American rhythms. Emilio Colon's faithful arrangement of Manuel de Falla's *Siete Canciones Populares Españolas*, the only set of pieces by the composer to quote actual folksong intact, and of the subsequent *Danzas Afro-Cubanas* composed by Ernesto Secuona originally for piano solo and later compiled as a set of

pieces which combine the atmosphere of Afro-Cuban musical culture and rhythm as well as influences of Spanish melodies, were brilliantly performed resulting in music with unique Caribbean sound, dance rhythm and jazzy chromaticism.

Astor Piazzolla's striking *Le Grand Tango*, dedicated to the legendary Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich ended the performance and lived up to its name.

The more concise encore *La Muerte del Angel* said it all very dramatically, convincing all that Emilio Colon and Nariaki Suguria constituted a formidable performing duo whose impact will surely be remembered for quite some time.