

## GAIA CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL THUN: OPENING AND MATINEE CONCERTS

# Born of chaos – matured to perfection

The first Gaia chamber music festival wafted through Thun like a light summer breeze and delighted the audience.

In the Rittersaal (Knights' Hall) of Thun Castle, internationally well-known, successful musicians got together for the opening of the first Gaia chamber music festival in Thun. The artists had already rehearsed together for a full week for the four concerts, two of which took place in Thun Castle, one in the Alte Oele theatre in Thun and one in Oberhofen Castle.

## Gaia – creative Mother Earth

Leading the organisation of the festival were architect Christoph Ott, who lives in Bern, and violinist Gwendolyn Masin. While Ott took over the organisational direction, Masin, as its artistic director, has become the human embodiment of the festival's namesake. In Greek mythology, Gaia is Earth, personified in the form of a goddess. She is a world born out of Chaos and perfectly represents Mother Earth in a fertile female form. Similarly, the festival was seemingly born of Masin herself when she founded it in 2006. All of the artists participating in the festival were personally selected by Masin and maintain a close relationship with the initiator. "Many of us first got to know one another as students," Masin recalls.

## Mozart to Fauré

The pieces performed consisted of the trio in E flat major KV 498 ("Kegelstatt") for piano, clarinet and viola by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the piano trio in D minor opus 49 by Felix Mendelssohn, and the piano quartet in C minor opus 15 No. 1 by Gabriel Fauré. All of the artists radiated a youthfulness and lightness



Mikhail Zemtsov (viola) and Yevgeny Yehudin (clarinet) played brilliantly at the opening of the Gaia Chamber Musical Festival in the Rittersaal (Knights' Hall) of Thun Castle.

which is often missing in musicians of this genre. Nevertheless, or perhaps due to this, they played with great precision and at an unbelievably high technical level.

Masin, who is a perfectionist, ensured that Friday evening would not only be an acoustic experience but a visual one as well. Three extravagant lamps, black designer chairs and lavish flower arrangements decorated the stage in the Rittersaal (Knights' Hall). The audience was thrilled by the concert and showed its appreciation with much applause and even a few cheers of excitement.

## Surprise concert

The Gaia chamber music festival's matinee concert on Sunday morning in Oberhofen Castle was also marked by spontaneity and youthfulness. Thus, the concert did not open with Ludwig van Beethoven's trio for violin, viola and violoncello in C minor, opus 9 No. 3 as announced in the programme, but rather with a canon by Domenico Gabrielli, which both cellists, Timora Rosler and Gavriel Lipkind, performed with marvellous virtuosity. The "American" string

quartet in F major opus 96 by Antonín Dvorák, the effortlessness of which could be felt in the playing of the musicians, offered the public a pleasant break after the somewhat heavier piece by Beethoven. Particularly Gwendolyn Masin shined in the higher registers of the quartet's second movement. It seemed as though Masin merged with her instrument and in so doing, enchanted her audience with her singing, dulcet violin-playing. Sandrine Cantoreggi (violin), Ilya Hoffman (viola) and Gavriel Lipkind (violoncello), who together with Masin make up the Lipkind Quartet, also did justice to Dvorák's light,

lively sounds with the high quality of their playing and with much feeling for the music. The second surprise of the concert was "Night", a composition by Ernest Bloch. The musicians allowed the heaviness and darkness of the night to come alive through their playing. Nevertheless, the almost dissonant sounds seemed to continuously dissolve so as to sink still deeper and more somberly into the minor tones of the night.

## And finally, "Passacaglia"

To leave the audience with such heavy material would not fit with Masin's sunny disposition and so she marked the end of the

concert on a cheery note with Johan Halvorsen's "Passacaglia". In the piece, it was not only Masin, but also Gavriel Lipkind who demonstrated great prowess. Although the "Passacaglia" was originally written for violin and viola, Lipkind effortlessly played the viola part on his violoncello. Following this great performance by the musicians, the audience could no longer remain seated and showed their enthusiasm with standing ovations.

TERESE KRÄHENBÜHL



Gwendolyn Masin, Artistic Director of Gaia

## Conclusion

### Gaia the second

"We have been able to draw a stunning final result. We welcomed more than 500 listeners," Christoph Ott, organisational director of the chamber music festival, reported happily. Due to the many positive responses from the visitors, some of whom even travelled to the festival from Belgium, England and France, Ott has great visions for the future. "A year from now, we will hold the Gaia Festival in Thun for the second time with the goal of appealing to an international audience." So that guests can be offered a world-class programme again in the coming year, musicians are already being engaged for the next Gaia. Gwendolyn Masin is also enthused: "Thun offers a unique setting and the audience here is incredibly cordial. I am already looking forward to next year." **tku**