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Forfest Impressions

by Laurence Sherr

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Renaissance and Baroque architecture dominate this town that was rebuilt after being destroyed in the Thirty Years' War, but it is a pleasant discovery to find a Jugendstil façade on the main square, above whose roofline the twin spires of the neo-gothic Church of St. Maurice are silhouetted by the sunset. Chateau Kroměříž (Archiepiscopal Castle) is a magnificent palace just off the town square, the summer seat of the Bishops and Archbishops of nearby Olomouc, the sixth largest city in the Czech Republic. Therein are located numerous galleries, with paintings by European masters such as Titian, Van Dyck, Brueghel, and Veronese. The Chateau hosted Forfest concerts in one of its upper galleries, and in the Assembly Hall, a cavernous space of highly ornate Rococo interior design.

Forfest is unique in its two foci: recent music and art that explores new and experimental trends, and equally, the connection between spirituality and art. Vaclav and Zdenka Vaculovič feel that both of these are vitally important for the arts in contemporary society. The majority of Forfest events this year spanned several weeks in late June and early July, and included concerts and gallery openings in Kroměříž and surrounding sites like Olomouc and Hodonín. At the center of the festival is a three-day biennial international colloquium. Incorporating multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives, participants address spirituality and developing trends in music, art, and culture, and the threat to spirituality in contemporary society. My one-week stay was occupied with eight concerts and three full days of colloquium activities. While there is not space to reflect on each event, perhaps highlights will provide some festival flavor.



Concerts and Art Displays

The 25 June Chateau gallery concert, featuring Aisling Agnew, flute and Matthew McAllister, guitar, was a stunning exhibition of virtuosity and sonic coloration that was notable for how the artists superseded performance flair to deliver each composers work with conviction and integrity. Their interwoven solo and duo repertory was also part of their intentional aesthetic, comprised of composers with whom they had established personal relationships. As Agnew noted, "We feel that it is a very alive format...We're building relationships and working partnerships [with composers] around the world. Music should be alive, and evolving."

Two different concerts filled the evening of 26 June. In the Assembly Hall, Czech cellist Štěpán Filípek and Slovak pianist Ondrej Olos tackled a challenging program of works by living Czech composers, all of whom were in attendance. Filípek handled the sudden shifts of musical landscape, technical playing, and dissonant passages with aplomb. Composer František Emmert, the dean of Czech composers, had two cello and piano works on the program. Two solo cello compositions balanced Emmert's contributions, including the world premiere of a 2012 work by Jan Hajič. While Assembly Hall's 25-meter ceiling with three paintings occupying 400 square meters is visually impressive, the diffuse acoustics may have led listeners to lose clarity in some of the pieces.

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Featured on the next evening's concert was the work of Massimiliano Messieri, a composer from the Republic of San Marino. (For the curious, the Republic of San Marino is a very small independent country surrounded by Italy, similar to Vatican City.) His solo piano work *Echi di voce umana* fused modern harmonic language with subtle timbral shadings that were superbly expressed by Slovak pianist Elena Letňanová. The second half of the program featured the collaboration between Messieri and Italian

--Continued on page 10

Forfest *Continued from page 1*

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