



Thu, 6 October 2011

Text size

Future of classical music lies with the young

06/10/2011



A world-class pianist organised a festival in the idyllic lakeside resort of Ascona to let people experience the joys of classical music.

The Ascona Music Festival, held for the second time in southern Switzerland, offered 11 concerts throughout July and August. It featured internationally renowned musicians such as pianist Daniel Levy, violinist Robert Zimansky and cellist Franco Maggio Ormezowski, who performed works by Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt among others.

Daniel Levy, classical pianist and co-founder of the event, said he was happy with the audience turnout. The festival drew a nice mix of tourists, locals and Italians from across the border, but mainly elderly people.



"I would like to attract more young people, but that's difficult, as they are not used to listening to classical music," Levy said. You could not say that classical music appealed or did not appeal to them, because they were not familiar with it and did not have the possibility to choose, he added.

Sparking young people's interest in serious music was a challenge, as pop was omnipresent and readily accessible, Levy said. "When you turn on the radio, you find 15 channels playing popular music before you get to the channel with classical music."

There was also a lack of curiosity and interest in classical music among young people because of all the high-tech gadgets available: "Why listen to something from the past that is not anymore talking to me, they think."

Musicians had a responsibility and should do more to help the young overcome their indifference, Levy said. If they did not manage to spark curiosity and get young people involved in music projects, there was a danger of losing whole new generations.

"We need more musicians like Yehudi Menuhin, who do not just play but also contribute to this."

It was not enough to get the young to attend concerts. They needed to learn to listen, learn the language of music and integrate music in everyday life.

"Listening is an activity that is not just listening to music," Levy said, adding that it had an impact on people understanding each other, on human relationships and social interaction.

Making classical music accessible to the young is of great importance, as it has a positive effect on their emotions, thoughts and personality. It also changes their perspectives and prospects, as Venezuelan pianist José Antonio Abreu showed in the 1970s when he offered children from poor socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity to play an instrument.

"This was a very special project where music was like an idiom to attract these young people, but especially to give them a role," said Levy. Youngsters were keen to learn an instrument if they got the opportunity: "There is not a physical barrier between classical music and young people but a mental one."



Music education is essential, but it is equally important that musicians show the audience that they are devoted and try to put all their energy into the project, so as to motivate people to listen to classical music.

Fact file:

The Ascona Music Festival took place in the canton of Ticino from 9 July until 27 August 2011.

The music festival was founded in 2009 by pianist Daniel Levy and a small circle of friends. It is devoted to chamber music and relationships and is about musical friendship. The festival offers people the opportunity to experience classical music in a charming setting and aims to attract more young people.

"The Joy of listening to Classical Music in the Library", another event held on seven consecutive evenings during the Ascona festival, invites people to get a taste of classical music in the Mediterranean garden of the public library of Ascona.



Levy is planning a festival of chamber music in southern Argentina in 2012. It will take place in Bariloche on the shores of Lake Nahuel Huapi and will be based on the same principles and ideas as the Ascona Music Festival.

Levy is also co-founder of the Academy of Euphony that offers workshops on the "Art of Listening".



Katalin Fekete is a freelance journalist based in Switzerland. She has also worked in magazine and book publishing and has co-authored three books about Switzerland and cross-cultural issues.

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