

Bravo, Stephanie and Saar: Review of the SCMF's Second Concert

Audience was eagerly anticipating the concert of the piano duo from New York. For the second day of SCMF, the Bosnian Army auditorium was filled to the last seat by music lovers.

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Stephanie & Saar's last night's performance once again recalled all the epithets of elegant and innovative, that have been following them throughout their career. The program consisted of pieces by Debussy, Olivier Messiaen, George Crumb, David Crumb and John Adams. By conceiving their program from a standpoint of contemporary art curators, and by searching for the new piano sounds through the prism of pieces by composers of entirely different characters and compositional styles, the Duo's performance in the best possible way reflected the motto of this year's SCMF, "Out of the Box", - thinking outside the norms.

Stephanie & Saar began their performance with *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune* (1891-1894) by Claude Debussy, originally written for orchestra, which the composer transcribed for two pianos in 1895. The piece's rich colors of its original orchestral version, Stephanie & Saar brought to the sound reality, despite the fact that orchestra was reduced to only two instruments.

Stephanie Ho rendered impressionistic passages with precision, flow, and lightness, while Saar Ahuvia brought decisive accompaniment. After the Debussy came *Visions de l'Amen* (1943) [Visions of Amen] by Olivier Messiaen, movement called *Amen des Anges, des saints, du chant des oiseaux*, which Stephanie Ho described to the audience as the work of an ascetic, mystical and abstract character. The duo played it with technical precision and without exaggerated pathos, a performance that fitted Messiaen's mysticism well.

This was followed by a masterpiece of an American composer George Crumb, *Makrokosmos IV (Celestial Mechanics)* (1979). This is at the same time a performing masterpiece, because it demands from a performer the use of so-called extended techniques, playing on the strings, knocking on the soundboard, and use of external objects. After the ovations from the audience, in the second part of the program, we heard works in post-romantic, minimalistic and jazz styles: *Fantasia de Tres Mundos* (2014) by Martin Bejerano, a hybrid of jazz, afro-cuban tradition, and post-impressionism; *The Whisperer* (1999) by David Crumb, in neo-romantic style, and spectacular *Hallelujah Junction* (1996), by John Adams, which left audience breathless, a rare example of virtuosic minimalism, which a small number of players can pull off.

Stephanie & Saar concert was an example of a festival programming that brought innovation, new works, and new approaches to the Sarajevo concert scene. This was an opportunity for the audience to be a part of the latest current in new music performance practice, at its world's highest level. "Out of the Box" materialized here in its ideal edition. Bravo, Stephanie & Saar!