



Brilliant Bacchetti

AS WITH other inaugural concerts of the Malta Cultural Institute, this year's first concert of the MCI season took place at the ballroom of the Le Meridien Phoenicia. Over the years, the MCI has been collaborating with the *Istituto Culturale Italiano*; particularly for such opening concerts, and for this season the two cultural institutes presented 23-year-old Italian pianist Andrea Bacchetti.

The recital, which was held last Monday, bore the theme "*La Tentazione della Virtuosità da Mosca a Hollywood*" and featured a number of technically demanding works from the 19th and 20th centuries by such composers as Prokofiev, Liszt, Rossini, Debussy and Gershwin.

The programme was performed in reverse chronological order, transporting the audience from 20th century soundscapes through to Romanticism. The cursory journey across the rich and motley history of keyboard literature was extended through the Mozart and Bach encores to increase the breadth of time by including elements of the Classical and Baroque repertoire respectively.

Bacchetti showed that he was comfortable whatever the period, style or form and, moreover, whatever the difficulty the score presented. He displayed a superlative ability to combine academic understanding and technical mastery with musical

insight despite the serious odds presented by the piano at his disposal and the occasional restlessness of the audience.

Bacchetti's fine qualities were at once noticeable in the opening *Preludes for Piano* by Gershwin. Here, his very strong and supple fingers were useful tools for the interpretation of the rhythmic, and sometimes percussive, outer preludes. The second prelude featured remarkable articulation, *rubato*, control of dynamics and textural analysis.

The shortcomings of the piano were particularly apparent in the Prokofiev *Sonata No. 4 in C minor*, a major work of monumental stature.

During the first movement, a dull bass part inevitably replaced a potentially rich and sonorous passage. Notwithstanding this, the musician managed to produce some very effective tonal gradation during his very confident and secure rendition.

In the *Andante assai*, a broad variety of touches were appropriately employed and were equally satisfactory in execution.

The concluding movement was played with panache and it illustrated Bacchetti's meticulous translation of the details in articulation, dynamics and tonal gradation present in the score. Moreover, it was a clear display of the young musician's formidable talent as a virtuoso and his wizardry in apparently breaking the spell cast upon the

instrument he was playing.

The first part of the concert came to a close with Debussy's *L'isle joyeuse*. Clean and fluid rapid passages in an even and light touch were coupled with subtle shading to paint a highly evocative picture. It was a very colourful rendering imbued with a variety of moods. Moreover, it was spectacular in parts, particularly because of the impeccability and the technical brilliance of the performance.

A suitably tender Liszt *Consolation in D flat* introduced the second half of the evening. This featured excellent *rubato* and a sound handling of cross-rhythms. It is unfortunate that parts of the upper register sounded somewhat tinny. Impressive finger independence characterised *Un Sospiro*, the other Liszt piece.

Through careful articulation, well shaped phrases and effective balance, the pianist managed to transform the almost banal simplicity of the first two Rossini pieces performed into significant interpretations. The final *Tarantelle* was the epitome of perfection and thus encapsulated the underlying quality of the entire performance.

This was undeniably a very good start to the MCI season and one cannot but thank the organisers and, above all, Andrea Bacchetti for a most enjoyable evening of musical brilliance.

Martina Caruana