

ENESCU CONCERT SERIES: Remus Azoitei and Eduard Stan – violin and piano: ‘to the stars above’ - by Andreea Scridon



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Remus Azoitei and Eduard Stan lured us into the atmosphere of the evening with *Ballade*, a mournful piece by Ciprian Porumbescu, the greatest Romanian composer before Enescu. The two musicians chose a patient and calm approach, in a high register. This is a piece that can also be played in a slightly lower, darker manner, but tonight's performance was crystalline, almost operatic. It succeeded in conveying the eastern spirit, that mystical contradiction that seems to want to weep and dance at the same time. In this sense the piano added a classical touch, while the violin carried a trembling quality that whispered of a hidden treasure, a secret *beyond*. The finale reverberated hauntingly and Azoitei stood frozen with his violin for a moment, encased in the *Ballade*.

All great works are born, in some way or other, out of their association with the idyllic Garden of Eden that is childhood. George Enescu's *Impressions d'enfance* is such an example. It's hypnotic, an enchanting flight that jerks the listener, possessed as in a dream, into the spirit of long-ago. Enescu is also contradictory – disturbing, troubling and touching, perhaps as a result of the fact that *Impressions d'enfance* was written in his sickness and old age. The musicians' interpretations suggested that the piece is often too opaque and too mystical to be a work driven by conventional nostalgia. Enescu shifts from a dark violence sometimes reminiscent of Stravinsky to a feeling of sublime tragedy in his climatic moments. Azoitei and Stan were evidently confident in their profound understanding of Enescu's paradox, and interpreted accordingly and surprisingly: sometimes the piano would dip into a fingerprint of jazz, other times the violin would mimic a bird's chirping. They worked together subtly, organically: Stan on the piano replicated the sound of a child's bare feet pounding against the ground on his way to the stream, while the pressure applied by Azoitei on his strings seemed to urge wind through leaves and water over smoothed rocks in a stream, while simultaneously winding and rewinding the

composer's remembrance. As the pace picked up the audience was immersed in this overpowering world; it came alive for us as Enescu intended, through the force of Azoitei and Stan. Often we felt an undercurrent of exhaustion, an indication of the composer's illness and fragility.

After the intermission, Azoitei and Stan gave us Fauré's *Sonata* in A Major. It is a complex piece, full of romantic undulations and, at the same time, a modern urgency. Though it seems to have much more continuity than Enescu's abrupt pieces, the interpretation was familiar: Azoitei plucked at his strings in a continuous exciting crescendo while Stan, though in a secondary role, displayed extreme finesse. It's probable that the piece was chosen for the Enescu series to give historical and stylistic context, for the audience both to enjoy a beautiful piece and to have an earlier point of reference, and thus a better understanding of how Enescu's work came to be.

The performance ended with Maurice Ravel's *Tzigane* Rhapsody. Full of surprising moments, the vigilance and energy of Azoitei's violin made it seem like an anticipatory melody of a continuous odyssey, while Stan's work on the piano gave another dimension, enhancing the interpretation by adding multiple facets. Once more, just as they had done with *Impressions d'enfance*, the two musicians showed their understanding of the strangeness of the music – something wild, oriental, even nocturnal.

As expected, the evening's performance was acclaimed. More, it was marked by that feeling of grace that a truly momentous performance induces: an aesthetic satisfaction so deep it seemed as though the roof of Belgrave Square 1 was about to open up in the finest moments of the melody and allow it to float upwards, to the stars above.