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Pamela Hickman's Concert Critique Blog

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Pianist Eduard Stan in a solo recital at the Austrian Hospice (Jerusalem)

The Romanian Cultural Institute in Tel Aviv and the Austrian Hospice of the Holy Family hosted a recital of pianist Eduard Stan in the salon of the Austrian Hospice in the Old City of Jerusalem on September 19th 2001. This recital was the pianist's Israeli debut. (Photo: Sabrina Scheffer)

Born in the city of Brasov, Transylvania, Eduard Stan moved to Germany at age 11. A student of Arie Vardi, Karl-Heinz Kämmerling and Martin Dörrie, Stan graduated from the Academy of Music and Drama in Hanover, today having a busy international performing schedule as a recitalist, chamber musician and in a duo partnership with violinist Remus Azoitei. Maestro Stan records, his most recent CD being with baritone Peter Schöne for the Genuin label. For promoting Romanian culture abroad, Stan was awarded the Prometheus Prize in 2009.

Markus St. Bugnar, rector of the Austrian Hospice in Jerusalem since 2004, welcomed the audience, mentioning the fact that local and overseas artists perform at concerts in the salon of the Austrian Hospice and expressing his pleasure at the cooperation between the Romanian Cultural Institute and the Austrian Hospice. Mr. Dan B. Krizbai, deputy director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Tel Aviv, also addressed the audience, informing us that the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra was to perform the following evening under the baton of Maestro Zubin Mehta in the 2011 George Enescu Festival in Bucharest. Mr. Krizbai spoke of Maestro Stan as being one of Romania's most acclaimed artists.

Eduard Stan began the recital with Franz Schubert's (1797-1828) Sonata in B flat major D 960. Playing this monumental work by one of Austria's greatest composers was a fitting opening gesture at the venue of the Austrian Hospice. Schubert's last three piano sonatas, all late works, all three penned within a month, hang together as a kind of trilogy. The composer played all three at a party held by Dr. Ignaz Menz on September 27th 1828, having completed the Sonata in B flat major D 960 the previous day. Schubert died less than two months later. Performing this mammoth piece, Schubert's last piano work, is a demanding technical, analytical and emotional undertaking to the pianist. Constructed of subtle melodic material moving through a sophisticated scheme of modulations, some of Schubert's markings (such as the "fp" in the last movement) challenge the pianist to ask himself/herself how to reproduce certain effects that were played on Schubert's piano. Stan's playing addresses each modulation, taking on board the impulsiveness of Schubert's melodies as they merge into each other; he sets before us Schubert's emotional map in the face of death – his resignation, his introspection, his vulnerability and brooding, but also moments of a sense of well-being. Stan's playing of the delicate Scherzo (third movement) was not overly fast following the sparse, bleak second movement. Altogether, his treatment of the B flat major sonata was profound, colored and sensitive. Franz Schubert was buried at the Währing Cemetery in Vienna. His gravestone bears the following epitaph: "Music has here buried a rich treasure. But fairer in hopes, Franz Schubert lies here".

Romanian pianist, virtuoso violinist, conductor and pedagogue George Enescu (1881-1955) composed his Piano Suite no.2 in D major opus 10 (1903) for a competition run in 1903 by the French magazine "Musica", Enescu winning both first prize and the Pleyel Prize for the best piano piece. The piece was dedicated to Louis Dièmer (with whom Enescu had studied piano in Paris). Much of Enescu's music predominantly reflects the music of his homeland, but this work is also clearly influenced by French Impressionism (Enescu had gone to Paris in 1895, where he studied composition with Massenet and Fauré), three of the four movements bearing the titles of French court dances. (There is a 1943-1944 recording of the work in which Enescu plays the Sarabande and Pavane and Dinu Lipatti, the Toccata

and Bourée.) Enescu is usually remembered as a brilliant violinist, but his piano notation and precise markings (pedaling, half-pedaling, for example) attest to his mastery of the piano. One tends to forget that he was an expert orchestral score reader on the piano, that he performed solo piano recitals, did much accompanying of artists, even accompanying his own singing at the piano; the piano figures in 18 of his 33 numbered works.

Eduard Stan brought out the fusion of the young Enescu's fast developing pianistic style in a performance of Piano Suite no.2, creating a rich but ever articulate canvas, from the bells issuing in the opening Toccata (Enescu had also titled the suite "Des cloches sonores") layered with massive pedaling. The Sarabande, with its calm melody accompanied by arpeggiated chords, finds energy in melodies that are propelled from within and colored with both functional harmonies and empty fourths and fifths and chromaticism. Enescu reminds us again of the bells in the Toccata, the second movement ending with the sound and rhythms of massive church bells. Stan's reading of the somewhat pastoral Pavane was personal and evocative, an introspective, autumnal soundscape, its intensive trilling perhaps suggesting the sound of a shepherd's pipe, its conclusion tinted with sparkling delicacy. The work ended with Stan's virtuosic and precise playing of the forthright Bourée, the artist using a solid, hammered touch, complemented by rhythmic variety. Eduard Stan's rich and detailed performance brought home how neglected Enescu's music is in concert hall repertoire and how rich a kaleidoscope his music provides.

Eduard Stan played four pieces by Frédéric Chopin, beginning with the Polonaise in F sharp minor opus 44 (1841) often referred to as the "tragic" Polonaise; the artist's playing of the dramatic work expressed the generous, noble character of the dramatic piece, as well as its delicate and lush aspects. In Nocturne in F sharp major opus 15 no.2 (1830-1831) Stan weaves ornaments into melodic lines with natural, poetic ease, his reading of the poignant Mazurka in C sharp minor opus 50 no.3(1841-1842) peppered with small Polish folk dances, with Chopin's "zal" (Polish:sadness) ever present. In Chopin's Barcarolle in F sharp major opus 60 (1845-1846), his one and only Barcarolle, Stan's playing suggests the rhythm and motion of a boat on the water, not always calm water, the complexities and huge dynamic range of the piece inspiring personal expression on the part of the artist. Stan's performances of the Chopin pieces were sincere and unmannered, the pianist delving deeply into the real style and meaning of each genre.

Concluding the festive occasion at the Austrian Hospice, Eduard Stan played Brahms' introspective and tranquil Intermezzo in A major opus 118, the second of the "Six Piano Pieces", a late work completed in 1893 and dedicated to Clara Schumann. Stan's clean enunciation of contrapuntal moments was artfully woven into the tender, expressive fabric of the piece to make for a poignant performance.

Eduard Stan's playing is a celebration of the expressive and coloristic range of the piano and the result of his deep study of each composer's ideas and intentions. Standing away from the limelight, he allows the music to speak.