

TOURNEE INDE 2012

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Alliance Française Panjim Goa presents Frédéric Pelassy, concert violinist in a solo recital at Taleigão church on 29 October 2012 at 7PM. Pelassy discusses his career and the concert programme in an exclusive interview to the Navhind Times

This will be your second visit to India. Did you enjoy performing for Indian audiences the last time you were in the country?

I came to India some years ago and it was a great experience for me to get in touch with Indian audiences. Somehow, it was always easy to connect with them and get the message across, even in the places where people were not too accustomed to Bach or Paganini. I think it's because you do have a classical music tradition in India, for such a long time, a culture where solo recitals are common practice, with subtle music and refined artists. So listening to violin solo recitals is no strange experiment for anyone in India! In some places, I must add, the audience was as used to this type of program as elsewhere in Europe or America. In Goa, in particular, I met with very sophisticated music lovers, Indians or foreigners as well. Some of them had heard the pieces I played performed by Yehudi Menuhin or Leonid Kogan. That was impressive.

At what age did you pick up the violin, and how were you introduced to the instrument?

My father was a musician, so I got in touch with music very early. I attended concerts from the age of 2 or 3 and I was captivated so much that before I could speak, my parents told me, I could place a disc on the gramophone. In the orchestral music I listened to, strings were dominant and the violin seemed to be the king instrument. My father was a clarinetist, and warned me that the violin was also possibly the most difficult instrument to master. But this point only enhanced its fascinating appeal. So at six, after two years of solfège training, when I was asked what instrument I would like to learn, I didn't hesitate for a second : the violin! All these years later today, I don't regret this choice for one second either.

You've had an impressive list of teachers: Yehudi Menuhin, Michèle Auclair, Sandor Végh, Alberto Lysy, Mauricio Fuks, Walter Levin, Zakhar Bron: was there a central influence from among them upon you, or did they each have something different to offer?

I would say a rather wide array of influences. With Michèle Auclair and my first professors in France, I learned to be stringent. Sandor Végh taught me a lot concerning the "breathing" of the bow, while my left hand was more influenced by Tibor Varga and Zakhar Bron. Yehudi Menuhin taught me to go to the depth of music, to find the core of the message and make the difference between what is relevant and what its environment. Walter Levin had a decisive influence on my capacity to read and analyze scores before playing anything, Zakhar Bron was unbeatable in his way to link technique to musicology, adapt the gesture to the spirit of the piece you play.

With such great teachers, you have a direct lineage with some of the music you're going to play (for example with Eugene Ysaÿe through Menuhin). Did this help you get a special, deeper insight into the music? Did Menuhin tell you for example what were Ysaÿe's thoughts about how his solo sonatas should be approached and played?

Menuhin, but also Sándor Végh, were living legends; they had been in personal contact with the great composers of their time. You mention Ysaÿe but you could as well think of Béla Bartok or Enesco and of course, they were able to transmit the way they approach their own music. But I must stress that one of Yehudi Menuhin's main legacies was also the creative freedom on the part of the interpreter. He was not of the opinion that you have to enter a mould to play this or that composition. We can be sure that Ysaÿe shared this philosophy and that's probably why he devoted his six sonatas to different interpreters – expecting them to give a personal and inimitable shape to his music.

There is a strong "Franco-Belgian connection" (apart from Bach, of course) running through your concert programme: Ysaÿe, Milhaud, Massenet, Ibert. Was

this perhaps a deliberate choice, as your concert is hosted by the Alliance Française?

In part, this is a deliberate choice, not only because the concert is hosted by the Alliance Française but also because, as a Frenchman, I feel a special responsibility to make this music more widely acknowledged. 2012 is a "Debussy Year" and it seemed to me appropriate to focus on some composers who prepared or honoured what we have called "musical impressionism", a trend quite new compared to what romanticism had been. As for the compositions written for solo violin, they are not so few, even if the violin is provided only with its "poor four strings". You mention the masterpiece of Bach sonatas and partitas but the baroque age had other composers interested in solo violin: Pachelbel or Telemann, who wrote 12 nice "Fantasias". Locatelli composed 24 caprices, which may compare, by their extreme virtuosity, with the famous ones by Paganini. In the modern era, many composers have been interested by solo violin. There's Bartok of course but there are also Nielsen, Khatchaturian, Prokofiev, Hindemith, Denisov, Cage. That's because, actually, you can do a lot with "these poor four strings"!

(An edited version of this article appeared in the Navhind Times on 25 October 2012)