

## Daniel Hope presents his take on The Four Seasons at Gstaad

Adrian Mourby Mon 31st March 2014

**Vivaldi meets Max Richter in a festival that, elsewhere, focuses on forgotten music for the piano duo, writes Adrian Mourby**

'I've never walked up an aisle playing before,' says Daniel Hope at the end of rapturous applause that greeted the opening *Sommets Musicaux* concert in Gstaad. 'But then it's very unusual to play through several pieces without a break for applause – so the conductor had to find some way to bring me on.'



January's concert in Saanen Parish Church, a lofty wooden-roofed structure much loved by Yehudi Menuhin and Benjamin Britten, was subtitled 'a musical journey' by conductor David Greilsammer, director of the Geneva Camerata. The journey took no prisoners en route, plunging us from a Rameau overture into *Uruk*, a discordant evocation of the ancient Sumerian city by the young Swiss composer, Martin Jaggi. This in turn gave way to the warm tones of Mozart's *Lützow Piano Concerto* with Greilsammer at the keyboard which then segued effortlessly into Max Richter's recent 'recomposition' of *The Four Seasons*. With no breaks between pieces Daniel Hope was left to make his entrance – literally – from the back of the church. His walk had been well-timed because by the time Hope's playing brought him up to the Geneva Camerata, Richter's 'recomposition' had taken over from Vivaldi's 'Summer' and we were into a frenzy of sound that was Vivaldi meets a hyperactive Arvo Pärt. 'Winter' gave way to a Vivaldi concerto for two violins (for which Hope just had time to switch bows) before we were back to Richter's recomposition of 'Winter'. It wasn't so much a musical journey as a musical gallop and the audience, always a heterogeneous mix in Gstaad, loved it.

'I think it worked tonight,' says Daniel Hope afterwards, his hair awry. 'Playing through suited the programme but I wouldn't want it to become a gimmick.'

Hope is one of a number of top musicians – Thomas Hampson, Andreas Scholl, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Cecilia Bartoli – who for the last 14 years have turned out in the depths of the Swiss winter to take part in the concert series run by the youthful Thierry Scherz.

'What Thierry has done in Gstaad is remarkable,' says Daniel Hope. 'He gets the *crème de la crème* because people want to come and play for him!'

Scherz is one of the co-owners of the Gstaad Palace. His grandfather was the hotelier who lured the jet-set to Gstaad after World War II by booking the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong and Marlene Dietrich to perform at the hotel that dominates Gstaad. Thierry Scherz has continued this daring musical entrepreneurism in his triple role as hotelier, CEO of EOS Concerts and artistic director of Sommets Musicaux de Gstaad.

‘I realised that a lot of people come to Gstaad who would like to go to concerts but are always too busy when they are at home in London, New York and Paris, so I thought we would bring our musical Mohammed to their mountain,’ says Scherz. ‘Research shows that attention spans are getting shorter,’ he continues, ‘and so my programmes are short – and always without an interval.’

Working with a very small team, Scherz has built up the festival rapidly. For eight days at the beginning of each year, while the wealthy are skiing, there is a recital at 4pm and concert at 7.30pm. Concerts are divided between the painted 17th-century church of Saanen and the beautiful chapel in Rougemont. ‘Saanen is where the stars of the festival perform, Rougemont is where I schedule works and artists that are my personal favourites,’ says Scherz. ‘And the chapel in Gstaad is where we showcase new talent but in a very specific way. Each year, musicians playing a particular instrument are featured – this year it is piano duo but in other years it has been the harp, the violin, the cello – and these young musicians are mentored.’

This year, the Bulgarian piano duo Aglika Genova and Liuben Dimitrov were the mentors of eight piano duos. At the end of the festival they also advised on which pair would receive the festival’s contract to record a disc with orchestra for record label Onyx. There was also a cash prize the festival’s composer-in-residence Benjamin Yusupov, who wrote eight new piano duos especially for the festival.

Genova and Dimitrov see the festival as a necessary boost to the profile of the piano duo.

‘There about 400 great works for piano duo by composers from Bach, Mozart and Beethoven to Debussy, Martinů, Stravinsky and Benjamin Britten,’ says Dimitrov, ‘but whenever we play, all over the world, people say, “How is it that we have never heard this lovely music?” ‘We are messiahs for the genre!’ adds Genova.

Scherz was delighted by the attendance at the daily duo recitals. ‘I felt I’d been to too many festivals where two celebrity pianists were put together on the night as a piano duo. Sometimes it’s very good but that’s not a real piano duo – with Genova and Dimitrov, you have two people playing as one.’

Festival audiences were good in 2014 and emblematic of Gstaad’s strange position as an international village. There is probably nowhere else in the musical world you’ll see quite so many facelifts and furs but, as Scherz says, the audience differs from concert to concert. ‘It’s never the same. I’ll look down the queue sometimes and say to myself, “Oh that’s the butcher – and that’s a Hapsburg”.’

Thomas Hampson, who sang a programme of Lieder with the Amsterdam Sinfonietta, was also pleased with the audience. ‘I love the enthusiasm and dedication of the people who come to the concerts in Gstaad. Tonight someone rushed up to me very excitedly and said, “I’ve never heard a Hugo Wolf song before!” And as a singer that’s very gratifying.’

A festival like Gstaad operates with minimum subsidies and Scherz sees this as the way of the future. 'Banks are very cautious about sponsoring. They want to be able to say the next day that this concert got them this number of new accounts. But culture doesn't work like that. It's slow. Consequently we rely heavily on private sponsors. But the problem with private money is you never know much in advance. I am contracting artists like Thomas [Hampson] who is booked up two years ahead but I do not even know what money I have for next year! So far I have always found the money.'

According to Scherz, this is the way of the future. 'Sponsorship of music is becoming more and more personal. Music in Europe is heavily subsidised by governments but that cannot last. It is a building whose foundations are getting weaker all the time. All across Europe concerts are being cancelled as promoters go bankrupt. This baby of ours is now 14 years old. I think we are getting something right. I am hopeful that we will last.'