

The Pharos Trust

IN A CLASS OF ITS OWN

BY NORA NADJARIAN

WHEN ONE SPEAKS OF EVENTS ORGANISED BY THE PHAROS TRUST, ONE OF THE WORDS MOST LIKELY TO COME UP IN THE CONVERSATION IS "EXCELLENCE". CULTURAL ACTIVITY IN CYPRUS CERTAINLY TOOK AN EXCITING TURN WHEN THIS NON-PROFIT CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION WAS SET UP TO PROMOTE A WIDE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELDS OF THE HUMANITIES AND THE ARTS.

Since its inception in the mid 1990s, the Pharos Trust has gone from strength to strength. Delighted audiences in Cyprus owe much to the vision and perseverance of its founder and president, Garo Keheyan.

"I started organising some concerts in the early 1990s," says Keheyan, "because I felt there was a need for high-quality classical music in Cyprus." Initially, he invited friends to perform, including the world-famous Chilingirian Quartet, and in 1995 he organised *Stream of Fire*, a major exhibition of Post-Soviet New Art from Armenia—

but it soon became clear that this was not a task for an individual. "People expected a large organisation to be behind these events," he explains.

Gradually, the idea of setting up a non-profit, charitable foundation under which major cultural events could be organised became a reality. Based in Nicosia, the Pharos Trust has been active since 1996, bringing outstanding artists, musicians, prominent intellectuals, writers and poets to Cypriot audiences. The Trust's reputation for excellence is reflected in the growing number of Friends of

the Trust and in the large and loyal audiences which attend its events. "In the beginning," says Garo Keheyan, "only 100 to 150 people would come to our concerts. But I persevered, and we are now in our third year of full programmes – over a dozen concerts a year. People have realized that whatever we do is very high quality and audiences have grown. An interesting mix of ages and nationalities attend, including foreigners residing in Cyprus, members of the diplomatic community, and Cypriots of all ethnic backgrounds."

Concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Rainer Honneck with the Vienna String Soloists.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE PHAROS TRUST

Above left: The award winning 17-year old pianist, Qian Wu, who gave a recital for the Trust in January 2002. Above right: The world-famous Chilingirian Quartet thrilled a packed auditorium with their stunning performance earlier this year.

These audiences have this year alone, been able to enjoy a huge variety of excellent performances - notably a piano recital by Qian Wu, an award-winning seventeen-year-old Chinese pianist, and the Trust's annual Chamber Music Festival with the Vienna String Soloists from the Vienna Philharmonic led by Rainer Honneck, concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic – arguably the world's best orchestra.

Keheyen is clearly devoted to promoting only what he feels is the best, and the success of the Trust is

the fruit of hard work and a consistently serious approach. "I follow the music scene in Europe quite closely," he explains. "I travel to Europe specifically to hear, be exposed to, and introduced to performing artists- always making a point of carefully listening to their work on CDs. I play an active role not only in selecting the artists but also the works they perform, ensuring that we can create interesting programmes."

Garo Keheyen is particularly keen to seek out and encourage young musicians at the beginning of their

careers. He deplores tendencies by modern audiences to flock to concerts by "big names" who may have reached their peak twenty years ago. "A young pianist who is not so well-known may give a mesmerising performance, whereas a big name may, quite frankly, no longer be as impressive."

Keheyen's enthusiasm and meticulous attention to detail are certainly some of the keys to the Trust's success, but the eloquent founder is not one to rest on his laurels. In the Pharos Trust calendar of events there is always an innovative element, and



Keheyan is always planning ahead. In May 2002, the Trust established its own Ensemble-in-Residence – the Pharos Soloists Ensemble – a chamber orchestra composed of some of the finest young musicians from all over the world. The Ensemble gave excellent performances, and Keheyan hopes to arrange tours in Brazil and elsewhere in the coming few years. There are already plans for 2003 to bring the London Symphonietta – one of the world's leading ensembles of contemporary music – to Cyprus, for performances of late 20th century music by Ligetti, Xenakis and new British composers.

This autumn's programme includes performances by the legendary Borodin String Quartet, piano and cello recitals by Alfredo Perl and Guido Schiefen, piano recitals by the

acclaimed Brazilian-born pianist Arnaldo Cohen, and return visits by the Pharos Soloists and Sergei Katchatryan – one of the best new generation violinists and winner of last year's Sibelius International Violin Competition.

The Trust's work is, nevertheless, not limited to music. As in previous years, cultural exchange is being developed and this autumn will see the organisation of two major art exhibitions – Sergei Parajanov at the Leventon Municipal Museum and Sarkis at Melina Mercouri Cultural Centre in Nicosia – as well as a lecture, in the annual lecture series, by Baroness Cox, Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords and campaigner for Human Rights.



Above and inset left: An exhibition and book launch of the recent works of one of Armenia's leading contemporary artists, Sarkis Hamalbashian, is set to take place in Nicosia in early Autumn this year. **Below:** Cover of the book, *Yearning for the Sea*, which was published by the Pharos Trust and launched earlier this year for worldwide distribution.

The Pharos Trust also promotes the arts abroad. In 1999, an art exhibition was organised at the Jordan National Gallery in Amman, while this year the Trust sponsored and organised the participation of Armenia at the 25th International Sao Paulo Biennale in Brazil. Some excellent Pharos publications this year include "Yearning for the Sea", an unusual look at life in Armenia in the 1990s, through photographs and text, and "Sarkis", on the work of Sarkis Hamalbashian, one of Armenia's leading contemporary artists.

Looking to the future, it is Keheyan's hope that the Trust will be able to implement an educational programme, whereby musicians will visit schools in Cyprus and expose classical music to younger age groups, "because, after all, that is our future audience." He is a firm believer in the importance of nurturing a love for



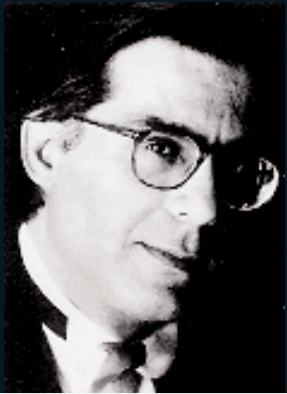
October 10-11
ALFREDO PERL-SCHIEFEL
Piano and Cello Recital



October 16-November 20
SERGEI PARAJANOV EXHIBITION



October 14-15
BORODIN STRING QUARTET



November 6
ARNALDO COHEN
Piano Recital



December 6
SERGEI KATCHATRYAN
(violin)

"When we enter the EU, there will be a need for greater awareness of the mainstream European culture."

The contribution of the Pharos Trust to cultural life in Cyprus has been acknowledged and praised by the President of the Republic and by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, which now allocates an annual grant to the Trust. Corporate sponsors for 2002 include, among others, Cyprus Airways, J & P, the Leventis Foundation and the Cyprus Development Bank.

The high esteem in which the Pharos Trust is held is also reflected by the presence of a group of distinguished personalities in the local Board of Trustees and in its International Advisory Council, which include Dr Eric Anderson FRSE, Provost of Eton College; Mstislav Rostropovich, cellist and conductor; and HRH Princess Widjan Ali, President of the Royal Society of Fine Arts, Art Historian and Vice-President of the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy.

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classical music at an early age and recalls his own school days in England, when weekly school trips to concerts at venues such as London's Covent Garden and Wigmore Hall left an indelible mark. "I think education is critical and I am concerned that we do not cultivate enough love for classical music in our schools. When we enter the EU, there will be need for a greater awareness of the mainstream European culture."

As with any other charitable foundation, the Trust is dependent on support from the public and private sectors. Sustaining this significant contribution to Cyprus' cultural life on limited resources has not been easy: at present, support from the government and sponsors only meets less than 50% of the Trust's budget. Keheyian hopes that the future will

bring new interest and further support – as he wishes to continue to enrich people's lives.

The establishment of a reference library for the Arts and Humanities is one of his plans, and his major ambition for the future is the construction of a brand new venue for the visual and performing arts, set in beautiful countryside outside Nicosia. This will consist of exhibition space, an auditorium with exquisite acoustics and artists' studios for residencies and workshops. "Artists from various disciplines will be able to meet and interact in a wonderful setting," says Keheyian. "It will be like an ancient Greek agora."

Given his determination and ability to succeed so far, one feels that this is another goal he is likely to achieve. ●