

Soft sounds at a contemplative chamber concert
23.03.2015
By Peter Tölke

WAZ.de

The 14 string-playing members of the European Union Chamber Orchestra come from many European countries, making a representative cross-section of many nationalities. When this orchestra then performs works exclusively of European composers, it is being true to its name and invokes thoughts of European unity.

The heading in the programme was: Europe dances, and without exception dance music from Schubert via Dvorak to Bartok, in original or arranged versions, was to be heard on Friday in Witten's Saalbau.

Such a programme is risky. Pure dance music lacks elements such as thematic development leading to dramatic high-points or moments of overwhelming orchestral sound, which provide breath-taking tension or euphoria. When an orchestra plays such a programme, it must use other means to retain the attention of the audience.

Correctly the musicians abandoned an opulent use of sound and took care instead of the gentle needs that chamber music requires. Loud passages were the exception. The playing remained controlled and no details were ignored. The finest passages even in the middle voices were lovingly delineated.

So it was, with concert-master Hans-Peter Hofmann directing, that Schubert's Five German Dances really had Viennese charm and a love of life. Two Waltzes of Antonin Dvorak came across as somewhat melancholic, testimony to the love of the composer for his Czech homeland. The Mazurka, op.7 no.3, borrowed from the piano music of Frederic Chopin, introduced the glamour of a courtly life.

In the Rumanian Dances of Bela Bartok, which closed the concert, a proximity to a musical orient could be felt. The outside movements were rhythmically very marked and sometimes rough while, in the middle, a painful melody – played on a solo violin – evoked the loneliness of a goat-herder.

It was a contemplative chamber concert. The audience's ovation was rewarded with an encore.