

National Centre for the Performing Arts

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India invests in the classics

On its first European tour, the SOI totally wins over Geneva

Musically things are happening in India...one only needs to follow the evolution of their repertory to get an idea. Created in 2006, the SOI, in ten short years, has charted an exemplary course. Because, under the baton of Zane Dalal, since last year (after seven years of a residency), this professional Orchestra, unique of its kind, has chosen to go beyond playing just a national repertoire. For this first tour of Europe, the SOI chose to play the Migros classics with a highly original program.

This British conductor of Indian origin, impressive stature and a solid musical background: starting with the organ, then as leader of a choral group in England as choirmaster, conducting musical groups in the US, has a natural rapport with the two cultures. Ardent musicologist and passionate in defense of western classical music, he is SOI's trump card. An ideal leader for captivating the old world with judiciously chosen works.

House Full with an enthusiastic audience.

Smetana (Overture de la Fiancée vendue) and Bartok (Concerto for Orchestra); is not really a program that would over excite the crowds! And a concerto for tabla as the main item in the first part is not exactly what the audience expected! Wrong: Victoria Hall was packed on Thursday evening and the Geneva audience warmly manifested their pleasure at listening to an orchestra so disciplined, so committed and so full of energy and enthusiasm.

Like all young orchestras, this one does not hold back. Although, maybe sometimes lacking in finesse in some of the nuanced parts, the musicians displayed a vitality and a mastery which would have won the unreserved approval of Bartok and Smetana. And with Peshkar by Zakir Hussein, emblematic figure of Indian music and cinema, the audience was lost in admiration by the virtuosity of the musician and composer

To succeed in fusing two cultures is a delicate task and Zakir Hussein is past master in this art. His concerto navigated with ease between the febrile rhythms of his instrument and the larger melodies played in unison with the Orchestra. The art of ruptures and the science of tension are no secret for this musician who can flirt joyously with jazz, tradition and who delicately upsets convention. With impressive agility this musician causes the Orchestra to pulse vibrantly. Every moment displays a strong complicity between soloist, conductor and the musicians. Intoxicated by the music, it was a grand moment of perfect communion.