

It seems that in the life of these times we live in, there is always a keen push of the awareness of conflict and crisis from all parts of the world, as well as a memory of conflict. That state of mind and being often both brings us together as partners and family in the effort to find solutions and build bridges or sets us apart as strangers living in a common home.

At the Embassy Series, these times—any times—re-enforce the palliative effects and the opportunities we engender with our events and concerts. In our last two concerts, we were re-enforced in our belief that music is a tool for diplomacy, and a shared experience that will lead create a bond long past the fading of the last notes of the *6 consolations* of Franz Liszt and the music of Bizet's "Carmen."

We were re-enforced in this thought by the presence of remarkably gifted and talented young artists at our last two concerts, conducted at the Embassy of Ukraine October 6 and 7 and the Residence of his Excellency the Swiss Ambassador, H.E. Martin Dahinden October 15.

The performances—by the rising star Ukrainian violinist **Aleksey Semenenko**, accompanied on the piano by the accomplished **Inna Firsova** and the exquisite Swiss pianist **Béatrice Berrut**—were of a superior excellence that elevated the experience of hearing and listening to the music in those settings to the category of memory slated to be permanent.

It is not that the music made the world that we shared disappear—they created a natural urgency to come together, to share feelings and observation, and the pleasures that were self-evidently offered. We knew that, as the music of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Bizet washed over us, that the Ukraine was undergoing a continuing conflict that has become an every-day crisis of suffering, anxiety and the interruption of normalcy. At the residence of Ambassador Dahinden, we were, in addition to consumers of astonishingly gorgeous music, helping to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the official declaration of the charter of the United Nations (October 24), an event which has already seen the arrival of all the participating heads of state, numerous and often electric and powerful speeches, including and inspiring and impassioned one by Pope Francis, on his first ever visit to the United States.



Both **Ambassador Dahinden** and **Donald T. Bliss**, the head of the United Nations Association in the United States reminded us of the duties, accomplishments and various missions of the UN and that Switzerland itself hosts the headquarters for many of the various arms of the UN whose missions include peace-keeping, economic development and assistance, medical and economic research and aid. The very existence of the UN reminds us of the precariousness of peace, the fulcrum of conflict across the Middle East, the threat of climate change and hunger, the war in Syria, which has created a refugee crisis of enormous proportions.

Surrounded by events about which we think and talk on a daily basis, we feel an added layer of piquancy when we share in the experience of superior musical artists. Semenenko—and Firsova—and Berrut are, relatively speaking, young artists, already acclaimed by critics, and with strong experience in both large and famous venues around the world, and in intimate settings. Semenenko had already presented an astonishingly precise and self-assured program at the Embassy of Luxembourg last year, and this time, presenting Beethoven's "Sonata No., 7 in C Minor", Giuseppe Tartini's "Sonata in G Minor", Eugène Ysaÿe's "Sonatas No. 4 in E Minor" (a tribute recalling the legendary violinist Fritz Kreisler," two compositions by Tchaikovsky and a kind of swoon-inducing rush of familiar melodies in "Carmen Fantasy," he showed that he is an artist who never stops getting better.

Previously, Semenenko, who looks the part of the poetic violinist, had eschewed excessive physical dramatics in his playing, while making precision—technical and emotional—a trademark of his style. This time, a more relaxed Semenenko—with the help of the warm playing of Firsova—allowed himself to show his enthusiasm and enjoyment in the moment: there was an



obvious display of pleasure and feeling in the playing that swept up the audience.

Berrut presented a different style, look and gift: in a gown that evoked a 1920s high-style Daisy Buchanan look, she appeared almost fragile with a blonde pixie hairdo, but played with remarkable power a diverse program that touched the heart. Light in the handling of difficult rolling portions of the Bach pieces, she moved swiftly into the more thundering depths of the music almost at will, and with great will.

There was something transformative in the way she played the diverse program, which could both sparkle when required and illustrate the variations of devotion and prayer, and the love and longing in the consolations of Liszt and the music, inspired by his frail friend Chopin.

The gifts of Semenko, Firsova and Berrut are shared gifts in which we all become beneficiaries and comrades as well. In this atmosphere of gentility and artistry, we are, in conversation and appreciation, companions to what the world can offer, keener for the experience in our awareness of what the times require.