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Sweeter melodies

The performance of Hohenlohe Brass Quintet was neat, writes W. Sreelalitha

PHOTOS: S. SIVA SARAVANAN



The quintet Gave Coimbatoreans a memorable evening

The hush-hushing motley crowd surely did not expect it: a delightful potpourri of Western classical, jazz, folk-rock, spiritual and Indian light music, with just brass instruments. Five of them, to be precise.

What's more, they discovered an insanely witty man in trombonist Christof Schmidt. So, a recent Friday evening turned out to be one that concert-starved Coimbatoreans wouldn't forget in a hurry.

Touring India

The Hohenlohe Brass Quintet from Germany is touring India, and A Minor Music Zone brought them over here.

When the group started off with the brilliant *Blues for Brass* (Richard Roblee), the audience observed with curiosity their pink faces turning pinker (closer to red, in fact), and were amazed all the same that mere blowing of air could produce something so magically harmonious. The band members moved to a sonata, and then to a melodious baroque by the great master Johann Sebastian Bach.

Next came Enrique Crespo's versatile *Three Spirituals*, with two trumpets and two trombones (not before Schmidt's assurance that the only female player in the group, who

took a break, would return for the next piece).

This was followed by a couple of very waltzable numbers, including the *Second Waltz from Jazz Suite No. 2* by Dmitri Shostakovich. Murmurs of recognition among the audience filled the hall when the quintet treated them to three famous pieces (*Hey Jude*, *Yesterday* and *Obladi Oblada*) by The Beatles.

In between the pieces, Schmidt introduced the instrumentalists.

“A certain instrument chooses a certain character,” he began (vaguely reminding you of a line in Harry Potter that the wand chooses the wizard). Tobias Ragle played tuba and bass trombone (“*A tuba player never complains ; is never late*”); Joachim Spieth and Martin Jacob, the trumpet (“*There’s a famous joke that when two trumpeters meet, they always greet each other with, ‘Hi! I am better than you.’*”); Sabrina Lander, the horn (“*Risky. Well, she adds a female charm to the otherwise rustic male group*”); and Schmidt, the trombone (“*Hmmm... Trombonists are the nice guys, always trying to achieve harmony*”). The audience were evidently doubling up with laughter!

The next to follow was Henry Mancini’s *The Pink Panther*, and the crowd was asked to keep time. “Keep it nice and steady. Don’t go slow. Don’t speed up,” instructed Schmidt, an English textbook editor.

Good finger snapping

And, we didn’t disappoint him. “Wow! That’s the best finger-snapping audience we’ve had so far,” Schmidt smiled after the piece, and a beaming audience lapped it up!



The quintet had stored a wonderful surprise in their penultimate piece: “a gift for your Independence Day. Belated, though,” said Schmidt. And what should flow through those instruments: an impeccable rendition of *Mera joota hai Japani*. A clearly moved audience took a long time to stop the applause. With the piece that saw a clever amalgamation of *Hallelujah* and *When the Saints Go Marching In* (and with an interesting little anecdote), an evening of humbling performance ended.

It was as much the choice of the pieces and the sheer variety as the flawless synchronisation and the group’s palpable enthusiasm that made the programme thoroughly enjoyable.

And, it’s not for nothing that the quintet received a standing ovation from the visibly pleased audience. However, the one jarring note to the evening was the insensitivity of a few people yelling boorishly into their mobile phones. Minutes after the concert, the members were mobbed by Coimbatoreans waving a pen and a notebook.

No boundary

And, the happy faces that evening said one thing: That music transcends geographical boundary. As you left the hall, you still saw the musicians gladly obliging photograph-and autograph-seekers.

Side notes

When the concert begins Schmidt keeps up with a certain tradition: he asks if anyone in the audience is from Hohenlohe. "Ah, I see one. My brother," says Schmidt, and his brother's protest "That does not count," dies amid the giggles of the audience.

The exercise

Corner Sabrina, the youngest, and ask her if her mouth does not ache after incessantly blowing into the instrument, and she says, (in a charmingly cute accent) it does. "But, just as it is with sports, long hours of practice and exercise help."

So, what is Schmidt carrying back from Coimbatore? "Soapbox." WHAT? "Yeah. I got a lot of ayurvedic soap bars from Nagpur. And, discovered I did not have a box," grins the music teacher.

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