

Friends of The North East of Scotland Music School

## Scholarship Concert 2014

Megan Cormack, mezzo soprano

Emma Barnett, clarinet

Duncan Pirie, baritone

Sophie Stammeijer, flute

Tracy Lee, piano

With Colin Sinclair & Ian Lovegrove, accompanists

**Craigiebuckler Church**

**Wednesday 18 June 2014**

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

Wednesday evening's annual Scholarship Concert introduced five different performers "Showcasing the best of NESMS talent" as it said in the programme. This year we enjoyed performances by two singers, mezzo soprano and baritone, two woodwind players, flute and clarinet, and one young pianist. Singers sometimes have to face a problem that other performers are largely immune from. Mezzo soprano **Megan Cormack** was suffering from a bad cold, nevertheless her performance of three songs from Elgar's splendid cycle, Sea Pictures, came across remarkably well. She had to hold back a little but her performance took that properly into account. It was superbly well-balanced - carried off with considerable artistry and mature understanding of the music. She was helped more than a little in this by her expert accompanist **Colin Sinclair** whose piano playing captured much of the colour and dynamic sweep of the orchestral version. Sea Slumber Song, essentially a gentle lullaby, was sung with proper attention to the shaping of the music from delicate rocking tenderness to the gentle but important crescendos. In Haven followed the ecstatic transcendent qualities of the music which amplifies the poem by Alice Elgar and then one of my favourite pieces from the cycle, Where Corals Lie, captured the sense of exotic longing expressed in the unusual poem by Richard Garnett. Well done Megan! The other singer was placed at the end of the concert. Baritone **Duncan Pirie** is quite young and his voice is yet to mature but he too showed great artistry and understanding of the music. The Vagabond by Vaughan Williams is another one of my favourites and Duncan managed to express the "gentleman of the road's" responses to the different seasons he has to contend with. I could almost imagine the character and the landscapes he traverses in this performance. Handel's aria Arm, Arm Ye Brave was preceded by the recitative which introduces it and here Duncan paced and shaped the music nicely before launching with fortitude into the bold persuasion of the aria itself. O Del Mio Dolce Ardor, a passionate love song was smoothly sung and in proper Italian too. Pianist **Tracy Lee** chose a broad range of pieces starting with Do It Again by George Gershwin which she played with just enough swing to put the music across. Mozart's Sonata in C, the first movement of K279, was played fast yet clearly and cleanly and best of all was the Berceuse by Frank Bridge which projected both gentleness and melody very nicely indeed. The best performers were the two woodwind players. Flautist **Sophie Stammeijer** opened her programme with a rapid fire performance of Rejouissance, the Fifth

Movement of Telemann's Suite in a minor. This was followed by the first movement Adagio from J. S. Bach's Sonata for Flute in e minor showing off Sophie's strength in breath control and her considerable beauty of sustained tone. Fauré's Fantasie for flute is an important work in the history of flute development. It was composed for Paul Taffanel, founder of the French flute school and champion of the Boehm system which modernised the flute to allow faster and more incisive playing technique. The Fantasie is in two movements, the first marked Andantino which Sophie played with sinuous smoothness, the second marked Allegro which Sophie interpreted with a zestful energy. For me however the star of the show was clarinettist **Emma Barnett**. Her whole performance radiated confidence and assurance, even including her introduction to the pieces she was about to play. The first movement from York Bowen's Clarinet Sonata was both athletic in technique and wonderfully mature in artistic flair. Bon Voyage! by Charles Harford Lloyd was composed for his friend Sir Randle Fynes Holme a gifted amateur clarinettist who was also a lawyer and an explorer. Bon Voyage! was written for Holme when he was off to explore parts of Labrador in Canada where he discovered a new lake apparently. Emma's performance expressed all the excitement and good wishes bound up in this joyful and optimistic piece. Emma concluded her part of the programme with the third and final movement of the Sonatina for Clarinet and piano by Joseph Horowitz, born in Vienna but coming to England to flee the Nazis aged twelve. Horowitz is regarded as an English composer but the final movement of the Sonatina had a distinctive Caribbean flavour to it. It was joyful and full of delight as played by Emma Barnett. The piano parts for Emma's three pieces were every bit as challenging as the clarinet music and Emma was supported by absolutely excellent piano playing from **Ian Lovegrove**, a teacher at St Margaret's School. At the end of the concert **Derek Buchan** presented the School with a cheque from the Friends of NESMS in support of the great work they do in helping pupils of the School, both young and some not so young, in developing talents such as those we were able to appreciate in Wednesday's first class Scholarship Concert.