

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School  
**Lunchbreak Concert series 2019 - 2020**

Stephanie Walker, soprano  
Aaron Magill, piano  
Emily Gow, flute  
with Shirley Magill, piano accompanist

**Cowdray Hall, Aberdeen**  
**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

Yet another first-rate concert as part of the Lunchbreak Series saw three sensational performers who are pupils at the North East of Scotland Music School in Huntly Street, Aberdeen. Perhaps I could also mention Albyn School since two of the performers are pupils there and one, soprano Stephanie Walker, now a first year medical student at the University of Aberdeen, is an ex-pupil at Albyn. There is one other performer on the list. Shirley Magill, mother of Aaron and today's piano accompanist. She is a class music teacher at Albyn.

Can I come to the accompanist first. Such musicians are often mentioned just by an aside, but so often they deserve much more than that. Shirley Magill, with the amazing expressiveness and sensitive empathy for the performers with whom she was working, deserves to be highlighted as one of four star performers at today's concert.

One of the dazzling highlights of today's concert was Schubert's 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' sung by soprano Stephanie Walker, accompanied by Shirley Magill. The piano part of this song is very difficult to play well. It should represent the rhythm and the sound of the spinning wheel in the song. Normally it would need someone like Gerald Moore to pull it off to perfection. Well, we did not need him today because we had Shirley Magill. Stephanie Walker was equally fantastic. Her voice is clean, clear and beautiful and she plumbed all the emotional depths of the song delivering the rhythmic pulse of the music in her singing as well.

It was Stephanie and Shirley together who launched the performance with 'Solveig's Song' by Grieg. Stephanie soared with ease into the fairly complex decorative passages of the song. After Schubert's song, arguably his best, Stephanie sang 'Au pays où se fait la guerre' by the Late-Romantic French composer Henri Duparc, its text by Théophile Gautier.

To the country where war is waged  
My beautiful love departed  
It seems to my desolate heart  
That I alone remain on earth.

As you will see, this is a powerfully emotional song and Stephanie delivered it with the required depth of feeling. We had already seen how well she could cope with the high notes. This song had quite a few low notes as well and Stephanie delivered them beautifully. She is fortunate to have been given a 'performers face' and the ability to make the best of it, by which I mean that, like Lisa Milne, she is able to project her performance right through the auditorium so that everyone there can think, 'Oh, she's singing this just for me'.

The sheer musicality demonstrated by Stephanie and Shirley was taken up fully by flautist Emily Gow, once again expedited by wonderfully delicate accompaniments from Shirley Magill. Emily said in her introduction that we would probably recognise 'Sicilienne' by Gabriel Fauré. Indeed we did, and her performance, with clean crystal-clear flute tone and mature attention to phrasing and dynamic expression was of masterclass quality. Genevieve Davisson Fritter (b. 1915), an American composer was a new one on me, but her piece 'Munchkins' from 'Adventures in Oz' sizzled with good fun on both flute and piano.

Emily's second two pieces began with a flute arrangement of the aria from Gluck's Opera, 'Orfeo ed Euridice' usually sung by a male alto but made famous in a recording by Kathleen Ferrier. Emily played it so beautifully and along with Fauré's 'Sicilienne' she had chosen her pieces so well for today's audience. She followed this with 'La Parisienne' from the 'Jazz Suite' by Jeremy Norris. Emily followed its busy notes with a special lightness and enthusiasm. Well done!

Our third soloist, pianist Aaron Magill, did not need an accompanist, but Shirley was there all the same as page turner. Aaron's first piece was Schubert's 'Impromptu in G flat, Op.90 No.3'. Like the other performers, the sheer musicality of his playing was quite amazing for someone who is still only fifteen. It showed a deep musical understanding throughout the complex fingering of a difficult piece which is nevertheless thoroughly delicious for the listener. Once again I go back to something that Roger Williams once pointed out, 'It is important not just to play the notes, but to play the music' and today Aaron most definitely played the music.

The same was true of his second set of two pieces which closed the concert. Debussy's 'Clair de lune' was a fine piece of musical picture painting by Aaron and I loved his performance of Gershwin's 'Someone to watch over me' even although someone in the audience had not been listening to Roger and her mobile phone decided to join in with a rather jazzy call tone. I always leave my mobile at home when I go to a concert. People can always ring me back later if it is important. It almost never is!