

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School

# Lisa Abraham, Emma Barnett, David Ferguson

Lunchbreak Concert  
Cowdray Hall, Aberdeen  
Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

Three exceptionally talented young musicians from the North East of Scotland Music School (NESMS) drew a capacity crowd to the Cowdray Hall for the second Lunchbreak Concert of the season. The first to perform was the youngest of the group, pianist Lisa Abraham. Her performance of Beethoven's Bagatelle in g minor Op.119 No.1 had been carefully planned and well thought out. The opening, which recurs later in the piece was beautifully cleanly played and delicately poised and then it opened out in lovely relaxed and expressive playing – a delight to listen to.

I had heard Lisa play the next three pieces at the NESMS Scholarship in June and she has clearly been working on these pieces and developing her musical response to them. Antonio Soler's Sonata in F was played with delightful fluency and confidence and then we heard Cyril Scott's splendidly colourful "characteristic" piece, Water Wagtail Op.71 No.3. Once again Lisa brought out the sparkling sense of light on water and later the movements of the bird whose name exactly describes what it does.

Chopin's Nocturne in c# minor Op.Posth. paid proper attention to making the clear flowing melody sing out from the piano in Lisa's fine performance which got a particularly warm response from the audience on Thursday.

Clarinetist Emma Barnett made us sit up and take notice with her splendidly incisive opening flourish of Poulenc's Clarinet Sonata in b flat. The cutting edge of this composer's music spiced with his special touches of humour were forcefully expressed in Emma's performance. Later on the smoothness of the music was still delivered with Poulenc's characteristic Gallic élan.

Louis (originally Ludwig) Spohr is another of these unjustly ignored composers, remembered chiefly for many years in a line in Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado's Song:

By Bach, interwoven  
With Spohr and Beethoven,  
At classical Monday Pops.

Well, at least Spohr is in exalted company there and he did have the distinction of having invented the violin chinrest!

Emma's performance of the second movement from Spohr's Clarinet Concerto No.2 was splendidly fluent and smooth and there was a nice edgy outburst in the middle of the movement. Emma must like that sort of thing because her final piece was Malcolm Arnold's

Scherzetto which alternated jazzy fast playing with pauses and gentler music – a different kind of humour from Poulenc's but very difficult to bring off – something that Emma managed to do splendidly well.

The final performer in Thursday's concert was bass-baritone David Ferguson. Every time I hear him, his voice has matured more and more. He gave a strong dramatic performance of Verdi's Aria *Il Lacerato Spirito* from the opera *Simon Boccanegra* and this was followed by two Lieder by Schubert from *Schwanengesang*. *Das Fischermädchen* is a seductive love song while *Der Doppelgänger* is a dramatic and rather eerie experience of a disappointed lover who has a strange dark vision of himself despairing at his thwarted love. Although the text does not mention this, the legend was that if you saw your doppelgänger it meant that you were about to die. David Ferguson gave a wonderfully intense and dramatic performance beautifully underscored by his superb piano accompanist Richard Bailey.

David completed his performance with Aaron Copland's *I Bought Me a Cat* complete with American accent. This was a splendidly jolly end to a marvellous concert though I personally have never come across a cat that goes "fiddle eye fee".

Let me add just a final word about our splendid accompanist Richard Bailey who has returned to Aberdeen after supplementary studies down south. After the concert Roger Williams likened him to the legendary Robert Howie. That is praise indeed and something that Richard has certainly earned. Well done!