

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School

## Early Evening Concert — The NESMS Clarinet Trio

Laura Smith (Clarinet), Kara Taylor (Cello), with Colin Sinclair (Piano)

The North East of Scotland Music School, Aberdeen

Friday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2018

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

The large studio on the ground floor at the front of the North East of Scotland Music School is an ideal venue for smaller chamber style concerts. The sound was clean, fresh and detailed. For today's hour long performance, which started at 6.30 pm, nearly every seat was taken and we were in for a real treat from the three excellent performers who make up the NESMS Clarinet Trio.

Cellist Kara Taylor and clarinetist Laura Smith were accompanied by pianist Colin Sinclair each in a virtuoso solo piece before all three musicians came together magically in a beautifully well-balanced performance of the Trio in a minor for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Op 114 by Brahms. This Trio gave Laura an opportunity to play the School's own special Clarinet in A (Buffet E13A) which was provided for the School thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor.

Kara and Colin launched the performance in fiery style with the Hungarian Rhapsody Op 68 by David Popper (1843-1913). The piano opened with a grand flourish before Laura grabbed our attention with a marvellous surge on the cello. The piece had a fascinating variety of cello textures from fiery vigour to extreme delicacy often with the most dazzlingly virtuoso fingerboard work. There were also particularly seductive melodic passages contrasting with the moments of sizzling fiery excitement. Kara delivered all these with considerable panache. It was a thoroughly rousing performance which Colin Sinclair described brilliantly in his excellent programme note thus: "the frisson of paprika still thrills in this piece". Right on, Colin!

The opening moments of the Rhapsody 1910 by Debussy (1862-1918) provided a certain soothing balm after the excitement of the cello piece. Both piano and clarinet were beautifully cool and sinuous at the beginning of the Rhapsody. As the music progressed however, there were almost as many contrasting instrumental textures as in the cello piece. Laura was able to make her clarinet sound both beautifully soft toned or else hard edged with marvellous 'popping-candy' pizzicatos. Legato and staccato were interspersed in what was a thoroughly captivating performance from both Laura and Colin on piano too.

Best of all though was the largest work in the concert, the four-movement Trio in a minor by Brahms (1833-97). The three players merged together beautifully. In the opening Allegro, delicious passages of cello melody were expanded upon by the clarinet while the piano provided those marvellous Brahmsian harmonies — not always in the background (remember the piano was Brahms's own instrument).

In the following Adagio the interplay and imitations between the cello and clarinet and sometimes the piano too were delightful.

In the third movement Andantino gracioso there was a memory of Brahms's flirtation with folk music and the instruction 'gracioso' was followed rather well in this performance.

The rapid finale (Allegro) was full of excitement and moments of drama from all three performers — a rousing conclusion to a first rate recital.