

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School

Colin Sinclair, Piano

The Sanctuary, Queen's Cross Church, Aberdeen
Sunday 4th September 2016

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

As part of the current Sunday @ 6.30 concert series in Queen's Cross Church, pianist Colin Sinclair presented a programme of virtuoso piano music culminating in one of the most terrifyingly exciting works ever written for the instrument. In fact the excellent programme note referred to it quite correctly as a "Shock and Awe" of a piece. It was the piano arrangement by Liszt of his Fantasy and Fugue on B-A-C-H originally set for organ.

The letters of Bach's name provide the musical notes of the theme: B flat, A, C, B natural which provide the bare bones of the work, often flying at us in transposition - but as you would expect from a composer such as Liszt, this is an eye popping, or should I say an ear popping firework display of a piece. Colin had already amazed and delighted us with his virtuoso playing in passages of technically demanding music by Chopin and Medtner for instance but it was in this piece by Liszt that power, agility and dazzling precision were brought together in a breathless display of pianistic brilliance. It was one of those performances that would lead piano players in the audience to think, "If this is piano playing, I wonder what it is that I do?"

Although Bach was present by name only in this work, the music itself being pure Liszt; Bach himself was a salient presence elsewhere in the recital. Colin Sinclair both began and ended his programme with pieces by Bach in special arrangements for piano solo by other composers. (This is true if I include the encore that followed the explosion of applause that greeted Colin's performance of Liszt's music). Colin played Busoni's piano arrangement of the Chorale Prelude BWV 639, Ich ruff zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ while his opening piece was Samuil (sic) Feinberg's arrangement for solo piano of the Adagio from Bach's 5th Trio Sonata for organ.

In this opening piece rhythmic regularity and the clarity of the different voices in the music were the hallmarks of Colin's performance. I particularly loved the way that he made the left hand melodies sing out where they were important.

Chopin's Fantasy in f minor (1841) opened portentously and with a suggestion of dark emotional power. As the work progressed, technical fireworks were contrasted with luminous softer playing. Darkness and light, contemplation and passion came through in the playing. The conclusion of the work was particularly beautiful in this performance.

Schumann's Arabesque Op. 18 demands a quite different sort of virtuosity. In some respects this work also projects contrasting dark and light emotions but most important of all was the litheness and fluency that Colin brought to Schumann's seductive melody.

Medtner's Three Hymns in Praise of Toil Op. 49 also contained technically demanding music especially towards the conclusion of the second and third pieces. I was impressed by the fluency of Colin's playing in After Work but what I enjoyed most was his suitably percussive playing in At the Anvil. It was highly pictorial and reminded us that the piano is often used as a member of the percussion ensemble in certain orchestral works.

The two piano solo transcriptions by Earl Wild of songs by Rachmaninov were emotionally expressive. The continuity of the vocal melodies and the romantic richness of the original piano accompaniments were given their proper due in Colin's performances of Earl Wild's delicious arrangements.

Following on from Liszt's thrilling music, Busoni's arrangement of the Bach Chorale Prelude sounded relaxed yet it was also emotionally powerful – a very lovely conclusion to a marvellous recital.