

NESMS 40<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary Piano Festival

## Music In The Sanctuary — Sunday @ 6.30 Series

Piano Recital by Darek Buchan

Queen's Cross Church, Aberdeen  
Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2018

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

Derek Buchan's piano recital in Queen's Cross Church was a real delight in so many ways. His programme was not just hugely varied, it spanned a fascinating extensive range of keyboard history and style. Derek began with two keyboard sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757). This music predates both the invention of the piano as an instrument and the creation of the classical sonata. These two Sonatas were something quite different. They were composed for the harpsichord or one of that family of instruments at the time. Derek's friendly introductions and explanations of all his pieces shone with warmth. They were packed with well chosen nuggets of information. Should such early pieces be played on a modern piano? Well why not! Consider the recent performances of an entire book of Bach's Preludes and Fugues at the Proms last week by András Schiff.

It does mean, of course that the pianist has to pay attention to the style of the music and not go overboard with a fully romanticised performance. I thought Derek Buchan took great care to observe the musical style of Scarlatti. In the slower of the two pieces he had chosen, the Sonata in f minor Kp. 466, Derek's playing was clean and perfectly steady. Left and right hand lines of music stood out with splendid clarity.

The second of the sonatas was much faster and here Derek's playing had the right lightness and delicacy of touch.

The next two pieces were by Mozart. In the Rondo in a minor K511, Derek delivered the different themes with contrasting keyboard colour. There were interesting harmonic variations in the rondo theme which comes back several times. Dare I say that this piece was nowhere near as interesting as the one that was to follow?

One could say that Derek's choice of pieces contained something special for every musical taste and the next piece, *Quejas o la Maja y el Ruiseñor* (The Maiden and the Nightingale) from 'Goyescas' by the Spanish composer Enrique Granados (1867-1916) was most definitely to my personal taste. It had luscious melodies and harmonies with just the right spicing of Spanish panache. It was worth coming to the concert just to hear this piece.

I should not of course forget the final piece in the official programme — the ultimate in keyboard virtuosity. This was Debussy's *L'Isle joyeuse*. Derek remembered when he had played this piece at a recital in Dundee many years ago. The reviewer had said that there is more pleasure to be had in watching a performance of this piece than in trying to play it. It is just so

technically demanding. Lots of crossed hands, sometimes one atop the other and lots of treacherous leaps and bounds over the keyboard. Watching Derek's hands I liked to think that here, Debussy has not so much composed a piano piece as choreographed a ballet for hands and fingers on top of the keys. Of course Derek had earned himself a thunderous ovation to which he responded with a much simpler encore.

This was 'Farewell to Stromness' by Peter Maxwell Davies. It may have been simple but it went down particularly well with some of the audience. For one lady who spoke to me, it was this piece that had made the concert particularly worthwhile for her!