

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School

Fiona Marshall, Duncan Pirie, Miriam Aspden

Lunchbreak Concert
Cowdray Hall, Aberdeen
Thursday 11th December 2014

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

The Lunchbreak Series has always been at the forefront of support for budding local musicians. It was heartening once again to be able to welcome three fresh talents from different branches of the musical spectrum, both instrumental and vocal, all of them pupils at the North East of Scotland Music School.

First off on Thursday was a young oboist, Fiona Marshall. Her opening piece was the first movement of a Concertino for Oboe and Orchestra in F Major by Johann Wenzel Kalliwoda. He was known by this name in German speaking countries but was born in Bohemia (now the Czech Republic) under the splendid name of Jan Krtitel Václav Kalivoda. It is probably a matter of sheer coincidence that his music, particularly the piano introduction played with considerable sparkle by Drew Tulloch, sounded like something out of the Savoy Operas (unless Sir Arthur Sullivan who had an encyclopaedic knowledge of European music was influenced by Kalliwoda – probably not!). The oboe part itself was jolly and playful, often rather ornate. Fiona Marshall carried it off elegantly and with a real sense of style.

Her second contribution was different in several respects. Firstly, it was for cor anglais rather than its higher cousin the oboe. *Scena for Cor Anglais and Strings* by the Australian composer Colin Brumby began in slow and languid mood making the most of the beautiful tones of the cor anglais. The whole piece centred on a series of playful contrasts between dreamy slow music and sizzling faster sections. The first entry of the faster music was for piano only, the cor anglais maintaining the slower pace, then both instruments joined in the faster music and slow and fast followed on in sequence from one another. Fiona Marshall showed mature mastery of both in a lively and entertaining performance.

Duncan Pirie is the current holder of the Ellie Pirie Scholarship supported by Aberdeen Bach Choir. Baritones are still sometimes classified as "bass-baritone" but it is some time since I have seen the classification "tenor-baritone" and at the moment that is how I would classify Duncan Pirie. Have tenor-baritones disappeared because either they or their tutors want to push them up to being tenors? This is a pity because it is not just a matter of range but of vocal quality too and to my ears Duncan has a rather beautiful voice and it will be interesting to hear how it matures.

His first song is a favourite of mine, *The Vagabond*, from *Songs of Travel* by Vaughan Williams. Duncan's diction was impeccable and he rose without strain to the high notes. This was a fine expressive performance which allowed the word painting in the text by Robert Louis Stevenson

to come to the forefront. Duncan's performance of Ae Fond Kiss with words by Robert Burns was beautiful and with singing like this he will never be short of bookings for Burns Suppers. Duncan also sang two Arias by Mozart: Deh Vieni Alla Fenestra from Don Giovanni and Non Pui Andrai from the Marriage of Figaro both of these and the second in particular with peerless accompaniments by Drew Tulloch. Both arias were attractively and expressively sung but if Duncan can just get his eyes out of the music and connect more with the audience he will be a real winner.

Pianist Miriam Aspden opened her selection with two pieces by George Gershwin: The Man I Love and I Got Rhythm. Both were in very challenging arrangements, the second more stylistically convincing than the first. Miriam has a delightfully sensitive and accurate touch but she did need to be just a little more "laid back" in these Gershwin pieces and percolate greater freedom into the rhythm. This music needs a lot of individual interpretation and regarding timing in particular, you don't follow exactly what is written on the page to the letter. With more experience and a growth in self confidence that will allow her to assert her individual musical personality, that is sure to come. Of course this is only true of music like Gershwin. Other composers would indeed expect you to follow their instructions quite closely. Miriam did just that as she played her final piece, La Plus que Lente by Debussy. As a result, we heard a performance that was carefully planned and tastefully shaped. Variations in tempo and dynamics were used thoughtfully and to fine effect. I thoroughly enjoyed her playing of this piece which provided a splendid conclusion to a marvellous concert.