

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School

# Student Concert

## Movies, Musicals And More!

Craigiebuckler Church, Aberdeen

Sunday 8th October, 2017

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

Sunday's fundraising concert given by fourteen student performers from NESMS was introduced with great warmth by the ever cordial Gordon Cooper. Among the fourteen musicians, I include Sunday's excellent piano accompanist Imogene Newland whose sparkling playing added so much to all the performances in which she took part.

She was not required of course by the two piano soloists Ossian Arthur and Peter Collins nor by the six opening performers, the members of NESMS Horn Ensemble directed skilfully yet unobtrusively by Beccy Goldberg. The players began offstage and entered the sanctuary at slow march tempo in the traditional piece Barenjager March. Gustav Mahler once described the horn as the noblest sounding instrument in the orchestra. He also said that when stopped, it could be the nastiest, however the sounds produced by the NESMS Ensemble were very much the former rather than the latter. I was reminded of Alfred de Vigny's poem *Le Cor: J'aime le son du cor le soir au fond des bois*. There was something of the outdoors and expansive landscapes in this music.

The second piece was Prelude, the opening movement of *Cinq Nouvelles* for horns by the Dutch composer Jan Koetsier. To me, its harmonies were rich and rousing rather than mysterious as was suggested by the introduction. *Can You Feel the Love Tonight* is a favourite song by Elton John from *The Lion King*. The tune floated nicely above a rich harmonic background. The Ensemble concluded their contribution with a rather astonishing piece by the musician, performance poet and comedian John Hegley. Entitled 'Me' it was not for horns at all but rather for spoken voice ensemble. Were there echoes of Steve Reich in this piece? At the end, the comic intention became totally clear. It was something of a rhythmic tour de force.

Young Ossian Arthur's offering was the Nocturne No. 1 in E flat Major by John Field. He was the Irish composer who invented the Nocturne which was later taken up so magnificently by Chopin. Ossian gave us a nice clean performance with a steady rippling left hand and clear singing melodic playing in the right hand. Ossian's playing paid proper attention to expressive variations in dynamics in his performance.

*Take Me As I Am*, a vocal duet from the show *Jekyll and Hyde* with music by Frank Wildhorn was performed nicely by Aneeka Anderson and Erik Esson. I stress the word 'performed' because the duo acted as well as sang the music which was exactly what was required. Erik had a clear light baritone voice, very natural and unforced, and Aneeka's strong soprano was impressive. Above all, both singers paid proper attention to getting their words across, something that is essential in a musical.

One of the players from the Horn Ensemble Louis-Pierre Girard came forward to give us a solo performance with Jimmy Van Heusen's song from Carnival in Flanders, Here's That Rainy Day. The show is not particularly well known but the piece has become a hugely popular jazz classic. Louis-Pierre played the tune deliciously smoothly and then in the second section he managed to suggest its jazz background just enough to satisfy. Imogene Newland's piano backing was fabulous.

By the way, at the age of sixteen Van Heusen changed his name from Edward Chester Babcock to the trade name of the shirt he was wearing at the time. If I had done that, I would have had to call myself St Michael!

George Gershwin's tunes were often composed for shows which have been long forgotten but tunes like Someone to Watch Over Me have become immortal classics. It was sung on Sunday by Hazel Wilkins. She has a soft delicate soprano voice which for some reason made me think of fine bone china. Like the earlier duo Erik and Aneeka she knew how to put a song across really well. I felt she really connected with the audience throughout her performance.

Young pianist Peter Collins gave us an energetic performance of The Entertainer by Scott Joplin. The film 'The Sting' rocketed Joplin from obscurity to fabulous success selling many recordings of his music as well as his sheet music. I myself have three volumes of it. In his Bicentennial year Joplin was awarded a posthumous Pulitzer Prize. What a shame that he died in obscurity and poverty. I thought that Peter played the music just a little too fast but congratulations to this excellent young man for choosing this piece which we all really enjoyed.

One of the most impressive performances in the concert was Charlotte Davidson's singing of One Hand, One Heart from Bernstein's West Side Story. She had a lovely fresh young soprano voice which was absolutely perfect for this song.

Before we heard Ruairidh Wishart play, I feared that a piece for recorder could be a bit unexciting for a final piece in the concert. I was of course totally wrong. He had chosen Silver Fingered Fling by Michael Nyman from 'The Piano'. Ruairidh used two different recorders an alto (I think) and a sopranino. On the alto he gave us smooth slow flowing music and then on the sopranino, fire and fabulous excitement. This along with a sizzling accompaniment from Imogene Newland made this in fact a well programmed conclusion to the concert.