

***NORTH EAST of SCOTLAND MUSIC SCHOOL
COWDRAY HALL LUNCHBREAK CONCERT***

Thursday 3rd November 2022

Eve Begg soprano
Chenghong Zhu piano
Charlotte Slater violin
Daniel Silcock piano accompaniments



PROGRAMME:

Eve Begg:

Handel

Angels Ever Bright and Fair from 'Theodora'

Haydn

With Verdure Clad from 'The Creation'

Hugo Wolf

Das Verlassene Mägdlein

Roger Quilter

Music When Soft Voices Die

Chenghong Zhu:

Brahms

Romanze in F Major op.118 No.5

Debussy

La Cathédrale engloutie

Charlotte Slater:

Elgar

Violin Sonata in E Minor (First movement)

Kreisler

Tambourin Chinois

The three students from NESMS who played in Thursday's Lunchbreak Concert are all winners of the School's Student Scholarships. Soprano Eve Begg won the Ellie Pirie Bach Choir Scholarship. Chenghong Zhu holds the Tom and Cath Johnston award and Charlotte Slater holds the Dorothy Hatley Scholarship. This being the case, I was expecting great things and as it turned out, I was not to be disappointed.

The concert opened with Eve Begg singing two favourite oratorio pieces. She was accompanied with noteworthy sensitivity by pianist Daniel Silcock. Together they gave Handel's 'Angels Ever Bright and Fair' a singular emotional colouring. There was Eve's sensitive and well thought out use of dynamic variation matched by Daniel Silcock's responsive playing. Eve's voice had the purity and clarity of youth with perfectly clean and clear top notes. Haydn's 'With Verdure Clad' has a number of fancy ornamental passages and these were nicely navigated by both performers.

Later in the programme Eve sang two popular art songs. The first was 'Das Verlassene Mägdlein' by Hugo Wolf, possibly his best known song. The delicious almost insubstantial piano opening was given the best performance I can ever remember by Daniel Silcock, then the expressive singing of Eve made this a very special performance. Surely Roger Quilter's 'Music When Soft Voices Die' would not be quite as good? But no, if anything it was even better. It felt as if Eve and Daniel were caressing Quilter's music in the most loving way. How marvellous was that?

Pianist Chenghong Zhu chose the 'Romanze in F Major' by Brahms as his first piece. Strong clear chords rang out splendidly in the opening section before the music became lighter and more delicate full of nice cleanly played trills before returning to the more purposeful chordal music with which the work opened.

For his second piece Chenghong had chosen a very different piece, Debussy's 'La cathédrale engloutie'. This is a piece in which the piano is required to paint a very unusual story/picture. It needs a great variety of piano touch, from mysterious liquid delicacy to strong ringing sounds. As he introduced the piece, NESMS Manager, Colin Brockie mentioned all the sound pictures that Debussy's piece requires – underwater bells from tinkling to loud tolling, ghosts of the monks chanting and so forth. Chenghong's performance gave us all these. I was transported back to the shores of Brittany. I lived there for a year in the mid 1960s, so I especially enjoyed this piece.

Colin told us not to expect the Elgar of 'Land of Hope and Glory' in his 'Violin Sonata' There is also the Elgar of the 'Cello Concerto' of course. The first movement of the violin sonata does not have the emotional charge of the Cello Concerto but it is a wonderfully lively and energetic work and Charlotte Slater captured that with a very vigorous and sprightly performance. This allowed Daniel Silcock to open up his piano playing to underscore the strong active violin playing. The interplay between the two performers was a delight and it brought out the considerable sense of drama which Elgar has written into this later work.

A real showpiece of a work concluded Thursday's concert. It was Kreisler's 'Tambourin Chinois' performed with considerable flourish by Charlotte Slater. Kreisler's showpieces are always deliberately 'over the top' and Charlotte was definitely up for it. The piece made a perfect encore to what had been a most enjoyable concert.

I was delighted to find Dr Roger Williams in the audience. For many years he was the musical director of the Thursday Lunchbreak Concerts and it is great to find them still running and with a performance of first rate quality, something which Roger was always sure to insist upon.

ALAN COOPER