

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School

## Student Concert

Craigiebuckler Church, Aberdeen  
Sunday, 02 October 2016

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

The Sunday afternoon concert given by students of the North East of Scotland Music School was introduced by Gordon Cooper. It offered seven attractive and entertaining items in two halves, each of which opened with a performance by one of the various NESMS instrumental ensembles. First to perform was the NESMS Horn Ensemble - four well matched players conducted and introduced by Sue Baxendale. Rossini's *Le Rendez-vous de chasse* began with a solo horn which set the atmosphere of the piece – we were in a dark forest ready to take part in the hunt. The other three horns soon joined in the lively chase and we were off in fine fettle into this first half of the concert.

The first of Tcherepnin's Six Horn Quartets offered a rich warm blend of brass sound reminding us of the organ just as Sue Baxendale had suggested in her introduction. Several of Sunday's performers concluded their contributions with a jazzy piece and in the case of the horns this was an arrangement of the well-known tune *Loch Lomond* with the arrangement and playing the solo horn part done by Louis Pierre Girard. This seemed to go down particularly well with the audience on Sunday.

Soprano Rachael Philip opened her selection with an attractive song by the operatic soprano and composer Liza Lehmann (1862 – 1918) entitled *Evensong*. Rachael's gentle singing mirrored the sunset spirit of the words. She followed this with a brighter work, the concert song *Se tu m'ami* by Pergolesi. Clean clear singing and proper attention to diction put across the Italian text nicely.

As with the horn quartet, Rachael concluded her set with a song which if not actual jazz comes from that area of repertoire, Jerome Kern's *Can't help lovin' that man of mine*. This was the piece where Rachael connected particularly well with her audience, her smile feeding into her vocal colour. Jeremy Coleman's sensitive piano accompaniments added considerably to the overall effectiveness of the performance.

Clarinetist Laura Gow began with the first movement, *Allegro*, from Mozart's *Divertimento No. 2* for clarinet and piano K229. Laura's playing had an attractive tone and she managed the upper register of the instrument quite well. She demonstrated a broader range of the clarinet in her performance of Paul Reade's *Theme* from the television programme *The Victorian Kitchen Garden*. This was a fluent performance that sold the melodic interest and coped in a refined way with the delicate ornamentations in the clarinet part. Once again we were steered towards the jazzy end of the spectrum with Laura's swinging performance of Harry Warren's composition *The Chattanooga Choo Choo* – a Glen Miller classic. There was a fine solo section from Jeremy on the piano too.

Closing the first half of the concert, pianist Anna Morrison gave a thoughtful, well considered performance of the Intermezzo No. 1 Op. 117 by Brahms. The rich Brahmsian chords came through nicely. Anna then turned to the more percussive side of the piano's character in her forceful performance of the Toccata by Khachaturian. This was a performance that grew in intensity and clarity as the work progressed.

One of the exceptional high points of the performance came when the five members of the NESMS Flute Choir took the stage. It was not just their playing but their stagecraft and their clear informative presentation of the pieces they were to play that really delivered – very important indeed when there is no printed programme.

Lovely sinuous playing captured the suggestion of a flowing river in the Flute Choir's performance of Vltava from Smetana's *Má Vlast*. Some of the flutes continued to flow along with the meandering waters of the river while the others carried Smetana's popular tune before them.

Different members of the flute family from alto to bass provided variety of sound throughout this performance. An attractive arrangement of The Flower Duet from the opera *Lakmé* by Delibes contrasted perfectly with the Choir's bright and bracing performance of the Rigaudon from Grieg's *Holberg Suite*. There was an especially fine arrangement for flutes of Harold Arlen's *Over the Rainbow* including the verse that was cut from the film and then with Anton Rubenstein's *Staccato Waltz* the flautists concluded what was, I thought, a fully professional performance in every respect.

Eleanor Cozens is a particularly gifted musician. She demonstrated two different sides of her ability beginning as a pianist and then going on to be a superb singer. Clean clear playing of a Chopin Nocturne brought out the melodic content and was properly paced and then *Take Five* composed by Paul Desmond, the alto saxophonist in the Dave Brubeck Quartet whose name is usually associated with this piece was played with a proper understanding of the style.

Eleanor's singing of *Gifts of Love* from *The Baker's Wife* by Stephen Schwartz (composer of *Godspell*, *Wicked* and *Pippin*) was described by our master of ceremonies Gordon Cooper as "very special" – I agree with him. Eleanor's selling of the text in the song was very moving.

The performance quality of the second half of the concert remained up top with our second clarinettist from NESMS. Isla Cartney began her set with the *Andante* from Mendelssohn's *Clarinet Sonata in E flat*. In this piece and indeed throughout her performance Isla gave us a masterclass in marvellous tonal and breath control. Her pianissimo playing in particular was something to be savoured. Both Isla and her piano accompanist Jeremy Coleman gave us a memorable performance of the second movement of Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* for clarinet and piano. There was deliciously liquid and fluent playing from both performers and then they both went sailing into the final performance of the concert. Once again from the jazzy side of the spectrum – it was *Swinging Shepherd Blues* by Moe Kauffman – and yes indeed, both performers made it swing!