

FRIENDS OF THE NORTH EAST OF SCOTLAND MUSIC SCHOOL PRESENT:

THE SCHOLARSHIP CONCERT 2015

Iona Fyfe, Voice Scholar
Sam Garioch, Ina Smith Scholar
Ella Clapperton, Ellie Pirie Scholar
Adam Auchie, Tom Johnston Scholar
Ngoni Masiyakurima, Piano Scholar

CRAIGIEBUCKLER CHURCH

Friday, 26 June 2015

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

This year's NESMS Scholarship Concert was somewhat different from those of past years in that other than two young pianists, there were no varied instrumental performers. The other three participants were all of them vocalists - two of those from performance backgrounds other than classical. There is nothing wrong with that these days and those two singers did include pieces from the central classical repertoire in their performances. It is good to find NESMS involved in the training of musicians who might want to pursue careers in folk or stage music rather than the mainstream classical platform.

The first of these singers was Voice Scholar, Iona Fyfe. She is fortunate to be gifted with a voice that has an instantly recognisable individuality. Youth, freshness and a particularly seductive feminine gentleness all came through in her singing. Her tutor Jean Webster had chosen two particularly apposite classical pieces for her to sing: Handel's Aria Art Thou troubled and César Franck's lovely Panis Angelicus. These are both pieces that have been sung by "popular" as well as classical singers and they came across very nicely in Iona's gentle transparent performances. These were followed by Sullivan's Willow Song and with Iona finding herself perfectly at home in her two unaccompanied traditional songs: Lads that were reared among Heather and What a Voice. There is obviously a future for Iona in the folk world and possibly, if she is lucky, in background film and television music as well.

Sam Garioch is studying with Peter Webster and he is involved in many theatre companies. Peter had chosen two classical pieces for him to sing. These were Linden Lea in the attractive setting by Vaughan Williams and Roger Quilter's O Mistress Mine. I would advise Sam to work further with Peter on these pieces and listen carefully to what Peter is saying about them because they will help him to gain more control over his voice across its full range. Sam was obviously more at home singing the Spiritual, Were You There, into which he put considerable feeling and then his best and most effective performance, Bring Him Home, from Les Misérables. He certainly captured all the intensity and drama of this piece, but he does need to bring his voice under full control in order to achieve a real star performance.

The third singer, Isabella (Ella) Clapperton, studies at NESMS with Alan Watt and hers was the most “mainstream” classical vocal performance. She began with two very attractive performances of songs with a pastoral theme, C. V. Stanford’s *Soft Day* and Michael Head’s *Foxgloves*. Ella’s performances were attractive paintings in song. Schubert’s *Seligkeit* was sung in an English translation and came across well and perhaps surprisingly for a classical singer; Ella’s performance of Gershwin’s *Love Walked Right In* came across particularly well and was arguably her best performance. Both of the young pianists in tonight’s concert are pupils of Joseph Long and they were very different. Adam Auchie’s performances of pieces by Chopin, Chabrier and Debussy were splendidly accurate but could have done with more of a sense of understanding of the “soul” of the music. Chopin’s *Nocturne in e minor* was powerful perhaps a little too much so and would have benefitted from more of a sense of freedom and relaxation. Chabrier’s *Habanera* needed to seize the spirit of the rhythm even if this meant moving away a bit from the printed page and the same was true of Debussy’s *Clair de Lune* which needed to be dreamier. Adam is of course very young and he possibly feels that he needs to follow the composer’s notes on the page quite precisely but as he matures he will possibly learn that he, as a performer, is every bit as important as the composer – and in live performance, possibly more so.

That is something that our final performer Ngoni Masiyakurima although only fifteen years old already understands completely. His performances of the two Preludes by Rachmaninov were not totally accurate throughout but what made them wonderful was that they captured all the spirit and excitement of Rachmaninov’s imagination. What Ngoni gave us was real Rachmaninov totally thrilling, although once again as at Cults, the performer was better than the piano. Ngoni’s control of dynamic variations in the music were superbly well handled so this of all Friday’s performances was the one that grabbed my full attention and made the whole concert feel really worthwhile.