

SCHOLARSHIP CONCERT 2022

CRAIGIEBUCKLER CHURCH, ABERDEEN, Thursday 23rd June, 2022 at 7:30pm

Performers:

Scott Manson Piano, (Tom & Cath Johnston Award), **Charlotte Hay** Cello (Joan Dickson Award), **Aaron Magill** Piano (Gina Dallas Harper Award),

Hannah Magill Oboe (Mary Kirkwood Memorial Fund) with Shirley Magill Piano Accompaniments

Dr Roger B. Williams welcomed the audience to the first live Scholarship Concert after a two year hiatus caused by Covid. He gave a brief account of the founding of the School by Lady June Gordon, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, a graduate of the Royal College of Music and Dorothy Hatley one time secretary of Aberdeen University Music. The School was to bring the finest music tutors to Aberdeen to teach its students. Roger mentioned some of the most famous of these including Dennis Matthews for piano, Raimund Herinx and Neil Mackie for voice, David Nicholson for Flute and Ifor James for horn to name just a few of NESMS' finest musician/tutors.

In well over forty years, the School has gone on from strength to strength as the quality of the four performers chosen last year for Thursday's Scholarship Concert was to prove. Roger turned over to Colin Brockie who was to introduce our four performers starting with pianist Scott Manson. His choice of pieces for the first half of the concert were 'The Partita No.2 in c minor, Capriccio' by J. S. Bach followed by 'La soirée dans Grenade' Estampes No.2 by Debussy.

Bach's Capriccio is powerfully fugal with numerous entries on lower or upper piano and Scott Manson made each entry and its tune sing out splendidly in his performance. To play Bach properly it is necessary to make your rhythm rock steady. You can speed up or slow down as the piece progresses but steadiness must be at the heart and Scott gets full marks on that account.

Debussy's music is very different. Manuel de Falla said that there is no traditional Spanish music in this piece but '...the entire composition in its most minute details, conveys Spain' Not only did Scott manage to convey that atmosphere in his playing but contrasts between soft delicate playing and thrilling crescendos suggest movement through Granada at night where sometimes there is quietness in the dark then explosions of light and music suggest different moments of celebration.

Cellist Charlotte Hay had something really special about her performances. You got the impression that she was really 'into' her music, absolutely enjoying playing it and this is something that she projected onto us in the audience. She began with the 'Prelude' from J. S. Bach's Third Suite for unaccompanied cello. Charlotte's performance was powerful and wonderfully fluent. It had a real forward momentum and made Bach's music sound really exciting. With Shirley Magill on piano as her 'orchestra' Charlotte gave us a strong radiant account of the first movement of Elgar's famous 'Cello Concerto in e minor'. I love that piece and I enjoyed Charlotte's performance of it.

Our second pianist on Thursday was Aaron Magill who opened his performance with Beethoven's 'Piano Sonata No 2 op. 14' (First movement). This was a well thought out beautifully well-shaped performance. There was relaxed quite gentle playing set against strong outbursts of excitement which fitted the structure of Beethoven's music so nicely. Like Scott, Aaron chose his second piece as a marvellous contrast in piano texture. This was Chopin's 'Raindrop Prelude op. 28 No. 15. A fine romantic piece with delicious melody and harmonies, Aaron made it sing out and his variations in tempo and dynamics worked so well.

Oboist Hannah Magill is Aaron's younger sister and Shirley is their mother. Colin Brockie reckoned that this was the first family-based concert performance for NESMS. The second movement of Albinoni's 'Concerto for oboe in d minor' has a busy piano part but the oboe has many long held notes. Hannah held these with admirable steadiness and I was impressed by the way she often made these long notes blossom beautifully. It gave her performance real depth of feeling.

Hannah followed the Albinoni with a delicious piece by Astor Piazzolla. It comes from the tango stable but many of Piazzolla's pieces are nothing like the sort of music that people like Victor Silvester delivered for 'Come Dancing'. Piazzolla's music is more specifically classical. Nevertheless it demands a special rhythmic pulse and both Hannah and Shirley certainly gave us that. This piece above all showed that Hannah was firmly in control of her instrument.

After an interval with excellent refreshments served in a gazebo outside the door of the church, great on an unusually fine Aberdeen summer's evening, we went back inside to enjoy Scott Manson's second choice of programme. He began with George Gershwin's concert version of his popular song, 'The Man I Love'. After the concert I asked Scott if this was his own arrangement. 'No', he said, 'It was Gershwin's own'. Well, is that not a compliment to his playing that I thought that he, Scott could have been working it out by himself?

He moved on to another of Debussy's Estampes, this time No.3 'Jardins sous la pluie'. It was indeed strong and stormy and yet somehow happy too. Is that not great?

Hannah Magill's second oboe concerto offered us two movements, Nos. 2 and 3 of Marcello's 'Concerto in d minor'. Lots more notes for the oboe here especially in the third movement. Wonderfully fluent with fine precision and a feeling of enlivening. She followed this with Ennio Morricone's 'Gabriel's Oboe' from the film 'The Mission'. Dare I say that the music is better than the film? Anyway, Hannah made it sing out beautifully.

I was delighted that Aaron Magill had chosen a piece by the Canadian (not American) jazz virtuoso pianist Oscar Peterson, 'Land of the Misty Giants'. He played it with just the right 'laid back' feeling as Peterson did on his TV programmes that I used to enjoy so much. Well done Aaron!

The final piece and the final performer in the concert was Charlotte Hay, ably supported by Shirley Magill. This was 'Hungarian Rhapsody' by the Bohemian cellist and composer David Popper. His dates in the programme are wrong. He was born in 1843 and died in 1913. The dates (1872 – 1886) refer to his marriage.

This was an amazing piece. There was one absolutely ferocious section for both cello and piano. The sort of thing that could have gone terribly wrong, but both Charlotte and Shirley were absolutely together. What a brilliant piece and such an amazing performance to top off a first rate concert. This was a real showpiece and it brought back memories of the early years of the Aberdeen International Youth Festival when top young performers usually from the USA would give us a very special encore. Happy days! I'm sorry they are gone but thank-you Charlotte and Shirley for bringing back those special memories!