

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School

Student Concert

Craigiebuckler Church, Aberdeen
Sunday, 5th March, 2017

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

Twelve eager performers from the North East of Scotland Music School were introduced by our genial host for the evening, Gordon Cooper. He made the audience feel perfectly at home and I'm sure the performers were put at their ease as well. First off was a young pianist Finn Stevenson Robb who played Mozart's Rondo Alla Turca in lightsome fashion with a nice sense of flow in the middle section of the piece. His varied touch and control of dynamics added interest to his performance.

During the afternoon I was at a similar concert given by the Aberdeen City Music School in the Beach Ballroom. One of the major differences between the two music schools is that while the Dyce School works only with school age students, NESMS welcomes students of all ages and the next performer Kathleen Christie will excuse me if I say that she is no longer of school age. She studies singing at NESMS and she is an alto or possibly contralto. She had two attractive offerings for us, *Che Farò Senza Euridice* – famous in my student days in the recording by Kathleen Ferrier. Kathleen Christie had obviously studied the song carefully and gave us a performance that mined the emotions of the song. Her second offering was *Think On Me* by Lady John Scott, another very attractive vocal work.

Schubert's Impromptu in G flat Major Op. 9 no. 3 was played by another young pianist Ngoni Masiyakurima. He gave us a marvellously fluent and expressive performance bursting with musicality. It was without doubt one of the high points of the evening.

Hannah de Bordes played the Allemande from Partita No.2 in d minor by J. S. Bach for unaccompanied violin. This is a very testing piece and Hannah showed considerable promise. Her phrasing showed understanding and intelligence with fine contrasts in dynamics. Well done!

The next piece was something of a surprise but in a concert where variety is the spice of life it was most welcome. Imogene Newland performed rather than played Henry Cowell's Aeolean Harp which when it was composed in 1923 would have been an experimental or avant garde piece. Imogene worked from within the piano strumming groups of strings and using the sustain pedal to draw a melodic line from the result. It was amusing, entertaining and sounded rather nice.

Baritone Adrian McBurnie had chosen three songs which were particularly well suited to his vocal range and quality. These were *Three Salt-Water Ballads* by Frederick Keel, settings of words by John Masefield. I thought Adrian put the texts across rather well – not easy since the first song is almost a patter song with its speed and rush of words. There was also a certain warmth in Adrian's performance, and I enjoyed it.

Lynette Thomas a young pianist played a Sonatina by Clementi followed by the Valse Lente by Oscar Mericanto. These are comparatively simple pieces but Lynette played them very well and they came across very attractively.

Violinist Steven Lee gave us a fine opening flourish as he began the First movement from Beethoven's Spring Sonata Op. 24 no. 5. He worked hard at putting the music across and has the shaping of the music well under control but further work on intonation would pay big dividends.

Janani Mohan opened her performance by playing a piano solo, Erster Schmerz by Sergei Bortkiewicz. She then moved to playing cello with Es ist vollbracht by J. S. Bach. She had a nice tone and was careful about intonation throughout what is quite a long piece.

Another not so young singer was soprano Louise McGregor. She also had two quite different songs for us. Handel's Care Selve was followed by Victor Herbert's Art is Calling for Me. Louise still has a very attractive soprano voice and she gave a professional performance of both songs especially where she added splendid elements of comic acting which turned her second song into a triumph of entertainment.

Ennae McKnight was by far the youngest of the three singers in the programme and she brought a delightful vocal freshness to both her songs, Once You Lose Your Heart, from Me and My Girl by Noel Gay, and then a lovely lively performance of There's Me, from Starlight Express by Andrew Lloyd Webber.

I was not sure that putting a couple of recorder solos at the end of the programme was a good idea. Of course I was quite wrong. Lizzy McCall played John Golland's Bossa Nova from his New World Dances followed by her lively rendition of Monti's Czardas. This splendid show-piece has been arranged for all sorts of unlikely instruments including bass tuba and once, on "The Good Old Days", by a clown playing a bicycle pump. Lizzy's performance had a bit more gravitas than that but it was still tremendous good fun and it brought the concert to a rip roaring conclusion. There is however one other person who deserves not just a mention but a gold medal for his performance. This of course is Harry Williamson whose accompaniments aimed all the performances in which he took part towards the stars. Harry tends to be a modest chap and will probably not thank me for saying this, but Harry, you really are up there with the best!