

**NORTH EAST OF SCOTLAND MUSIC SCHOOL
SCHOLARSHIP CONCERT 2017**

PRESENTED BY
FRIENDS OF THE NORTH EAST OF SCOTLAND MUSIC SCHOOL

INTRODUCED BY DEREK BUCHAN

CRAIGIEBUCKLER CHURCH

Friday 23rd June, 2017

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

This year's Scholarship Concert was more varied than ever with six young performers representing all the long term scholarships, the Tom Johnston Piano Scholarship, the Bach Choir Ellie Pirie Scholarship, and the David Nicholson Scholarship, now generously supported by the Skene Group. This year saw winners of three scholarships which I had not seen at the Scholarship Concert before; these were the Turriff Rotary Scholarship, the Cello Scholarship and the Martin Lees Piano Scholarship. Thanks are due to all those whose generous support is appreciated so much by the School, the young musicians who hold these scholarships and by the audience who were able to enjoy the fruits of these scholarships in tonight's marvellous concert.

The performance began with French horn player Ailsa Anderson, the current holder of the Turriff Rotary Scholarship. She began with a work for unaccompanied horn, *Laudatio* (1966), by Bernhard Krol who was a horn player with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. This was a splendidly atmospheric piece suggesting open air, the mountains and echoes. I was reminded of a poem by the French poet Alfred de Vigny which I learned at school, it begins, '*J'aime le son du cor, le soir au fond des bois*'. Ailsa managed the technical demands of the piece, the wide range of notes from high to low, and the multiple changes of tone and dynamics. Above all though, she captured the sense of space and open air that has been written into this music.

Ailsa's second piece was the Rondo from Mozart's Second Horn Concerto K417. This was one of the most challenging movements from Mozart's four Horn Concertos. The short but excellent and to the point programme note mentioned the "hunting" component in this music which Ailsa certainly captured very well indeed. Rapid repeated notes and other complex requirements in the techniques of tonguing were delivered splendidly. In this piece Ailsa was accompanied with just the right delicacy of touch by the first of our accompanists, Colin Sinclair.

Alex Riddell is the current holder of the Tom Johnston Piano Scholarship. She began with the second and third movements of Maurice Ravel's *Sonatine* (1905).

As the programme note said, this is "a radiant delicate piece", and Alex certainly had that delicacy of touch in her playing of the second movement. Her control of contrasting dynamics was particularly thoughtful and impressive. The third movement was faster and it sparkled, the French word 'petillant' gives a better idea of how this music was played by Alex.

She continued her programme with Rachmaninov's G Major Prelude Op 32 no 5. The programme note mentions a celestial song contrasting with a scurrying figure. I thought the word rippling rather than scurrying was what Alex gave us. She certainly made the melody sing and this piece was in many ways not unlike the Ravel. This style of playing is surely Alex's forte and her playing was a real delight.

Soprano Eleanor Cozens was accompanied by her mother Jill Cozens. Her programme was from the lighter side of the repertoire – show music by the American composers Stephen Schwartz and George Gershwin. She opened with two rather wistful songs from *The Baker's Wife* by Schwartz. Eleanor has a delicate, sweet voice that was ideal for putting across the gentle tenderness of both these songs. Her diction was impeccable which is essential for getting across this music where the words are so important. Eleanor not just sang these pieces but acted them too both with her voice and her delivery. She made us feel the emotions in the songs along with her.

This was equally true of the two Gershwin songs, *Someone to Watch Over Me* with its long introduction in which the words are crucial too and in *But Not For Me*.

Clara Daley holds the Cello Scholarship. She began with a well known piece by J. S. Bach, his *Arioso* originally composed for oboe but which also appears in the keyboard concerto BWV 1056. It was also featured in the recording by the Swingle Singers in the 1960s. Clara exploited the warm tones of her cello in putting across Bach's melody. She too used subtle variations in dynamics to put this music across to the audience. She was accompanied with considerable delicacy by Colin Sinclair. His more fiery playing was a highlight of the next piece, the *Hungarian Rhapsody Op 68* by David Popper (1843 – 1913). Clara captured the seductiveness of the slower melodic passages as well as the fiery excitement of faster sections. Her playing had the real spirit of this music.

Flautist Kirsty Campbell holds the Skene Group David Nicholson Scholarship. Her programme began with *Ballade* by Albert PÉrilhou possibly better known as an organist. He was a pupil of the great Saint-Saëns. Kirsty had a strong clear tone delivering smooth melodic passages and she gave us some delightful cascading runs through the piece with fine clear liquid playing. Christiansen's *Concert Fantasy on the Tango, Jealousy* by Jacob Gade was strong on melody and well ornamented with many cadenza-like passages splendidly well played. Kirsty was accompanied clearly and cleanly by Margaret Jubb whose playing was very sympathetic to the soloist.

All too soon we reached the final performer in the concert. This was pianist Siobhan Ironside who is the holder of the Martin Lees Piano Scholarship.

Siobhan opened with another Rachmaninov piece, this time his *Prelude in b minor Op. 32 no. 10*. This was a well considered performance and like the very first piece in the concert it delivered atmosphere aplenty. The bell sounds promised in the programme note were all there and I could imagine the coloured domes of the Russian Churches.

To conclude the concert Siobhan played Schubert's *Impromptu no. 4 Op. 90*. She gave the rapid arpeggios a real lightness of touch and also made the left hand melody sing out. She built some impressive melodic climaxes in the piece setting the seal on what was one of the best ever Scholarship concerts in which every performer (and that includes the accompanists) was a winner. At the end of the concert Derek Buchan presented the annual cheque from the Friends to Gráinne Cullen which will provide welcome help with the School's running costs. He thanked the many people who have helped bring this concert into being, the tutors, the performers and the Rev Kenneth L. Petrie who always gives us all such a warm welcome when we come to Craigiebuckler Church.

Derek wished us all a safe journey home hoping to see us all again at next year's Scholarship Concert.