

MULROY, REID AND LINDLEY

Bridport Arts Centre, Ilminster Arts Centre and The Dance House, Crewkerne

21-22 February 2020

Review of the Ilminster Arts Centre concert

Nicholas Mulroy (tenor), John Reid (piano) and William Lindley (artist) provided an eclectic evening of English music supported by visual projections. The song content ranged from the pens of Henry Purcell, William Denis Browne, Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett. An Evening Hymn and In the Black Dungeon of Despair to texts by William Fuller are settings that encapsulate so much of Purcell’s compositional and dramatic invention. As the titles suggest the mood of the songs is largely dark. However, throughout these pieces - and indeed the whole evening - art projections created by William Lindley were a complementary mixture of moving images. This collaboration was sensitively devised and proved to be an asset to the audience’s pleasure.

After the Purcell songs Mulroy and Reid moved to two songs by W.D. Browne. Browne was a First World War contemporary of his friend, the poet Rupert Brooke and both were victims of the war. Fortunately, Browne left a number of wonderful songs including *Arabia* and *To Gratiana dancing and singing*. The songs received quality performances from Mulroy and Reid making most of the melodic architecture and the superb harmonic sonorities so well laid out for the piano.

Tippett’s Compassion from his song cycle The Heart’s Assurance written over several years following the end of the Second World War and the death of his fellow pacifist, the poet Alun David during the Burma campaign. This death and the suicide of a close friend led to Tippett treating the songs as a cathartic experience. Compassion expresses anguish and pain and these elements were expressed wonderfully well through the combination of Mulroy and Reid’s perfectly matched roles and the further empathetic dimension of Lindley’s art projections.

Britten’s Canticle 1: *My beloved is mine and I am his* brought us stylistically and structurally back to Purcell. The text is seventeenth century with its mystical-erotic allusions to the Song of Solomon. Mulroy and Reid engaged the various shifting changes of lyrical passages and the quasi recitative declamations with well-judged tempos and intensity of expression.

After the interval we were treated to a new transcription for solo piano by Ian Farrington of Elgar’s Symphony No. 1 in A flat. The fifty-minute work is a real tour-de-force for pianistic stamina, skills and concentration. Anyone with a knowledge of the orchestral original would have had the sound of the orchestration constantly prompted. Several of the audience spoke of their acquaintance with the work and actually enjoyed the clarity and intimacy of the piano version. In the tradition of transcriptions by Bach, Liszt and Busoni, Ian Farrington’s Elgar symphony feels unshowy (although immensely challenging) and uncluttered and yet also faithful to the original score and surprisingly complete. Lindley’s visual projections help to hold our attention to the music in the absence of an 80-piece orchestra.

This was a programme that had originality both in concept and production and three performers who displayed enormous creativity.

nicholasmulroy.com johnreidpiano.com williamlindley.co.uk

Andrew Maddocks 2020