

NICHOLAS MCCARTHY

Methodist Church, Minehead, Bridport Arts Centre

Ilminster Arts Centre, CYM Taunton, The Dance House, Crewkerne

5-7 March 2020

*Review of the Ilminster Arts Centre concert*

The story of Nicholas McCarthy’s young life so far has been one of challenge, determination, tenacity and success. He shot to fame in 2012 at the closing ceremony of the Paralympic Games on London where he joined the likes of the band Coldplay. It was apt that a pianist of just twenty-three years and born with one hand only should demonstrate how he had overcome his physical disability along side many others that evening and achieved huge success.

McCarthy’s short tour promoted by Concerts in the West took him to such diverse venues as Minehead, Taunton, Ilminster, Bridport and Crewkerne all in the space of three days. A short gruelling schedule that would have been strenuous even for a visiting quartet or ensemble. McCarthy carries the banner for left-hand only performers with pride and huge ability. His programme of original music by Scriabin, Reinecke, Bartok, Julie Cooper and transcriptions by Brahms (Bach’s Chaconne in D minor), Charbonnet (*M’appari* from Flotow’s opera *Martha*), John Mann (Richard Strauss’s song *Morgen*) and Fumagalli (*Casta Diva* from Bellini’s *Norma*) was an imaginative selection from – astonishingly! - some three thousand or so pieces within the one-hand catalogue. Of the five concerts, McCarthy was most at ease with the Kawai piano at the Ilminster Arts Centre. The overtones of the Kawai instrument and to some extent the acoustics of the building made for the merging harmonics to be used to great effect in the newly commissioned piece, *Galilean Moons* by Julie Cooper. The pyrotechnics of the *Casta Diva* transcription and the early Bartok *Étude* were assured with an evenness of tone and finger dexterity. Brahms’s arrangement of Bach’s Chaconne was a most satisfying work. The intellect, skills and humanity of two great composers, McCarthy’s powerful and clearly dedicated playing and the resulting impact on the audience, was a true highlight of the evening.

Nicholas McCarthy compered the recital with a judicious mix of information and anecdote that was audience-friendly and spoken with a clear and modest delivery.

The Saturday morning workshop for young musicians at the Centre for Young Musicians Taunton (an outreach centre for the Guildhall School of Music and Drama) was an inspiring experience for its listeners. Through their questions and comments it was evident that they had found the achievements of Nicholas McCarthy amazing and hopefully a model for their own aspirations and efforts as musicians.

<https://nicholasmccarthy.co.uk> Andrew Maddocks 2020