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**CLARE HAMMOND**

**4-6 July 2019**

**Wellhayes Vineyard (Somerset), Bridport Arts Centre (Dorset)**

**Ilminster Arts Centre (Somerset), Crewkerne The Dance House (Somerset)**

Clare Hammond, described by The Daily Telegraph critic as a pianist of “amazing power and panache”, gave a short mini-tour for Concerts in the West and performances that justify the plaudits she continues to receive.

Unlike other instrumental performers, solo pianists have to adapt to the qualities, constraints and opportunities of the instrument provided at their concert venue. Performing the same programme on four different pianos in four different acoustics and all within three days is a tall order. However, one factor did remain constant on this occasion, viz. Clare Hammond’s outstanding technical skills, musicianship and approach to the music.

Except for the world premiere of *Diary Pieces (2018)* by Michael Zev Gordon, Clare Hammond presented a programme that she knew intimately: *Sonata No 3* by the eighteenth century Czech composer, Josef Mysliveček, Schumann’s *Humoreske Op 20*, a selection of *Préludes* by Debussy and Rachmaninov’s monumental *Piano Sonata No 2*. Throughout the performances Clare Hammond showed her willingness to devote her prodigious technical skills to the cause of the composers’ perceived intentions. Her love and care of the music was always primary and this respect was something that was palpable and ever present.

For many, the music of Josef Mysliveček is unknown. But here, Clare Hammond has discovered a cause in bringing the piano music of this near contemporary of Mozart to a wider audience. Her most recent CD recording for the BIS label of the Czech composer’s piano works is part of this advocacy.

*Diary Pieces (2018)* by Michael Zev Gordon is a fascinating series of seven miniatures resembling pieces of fine cut glass. Each reflected a different idea juxtaposing the simplicity of a simple waltz with that of melancholy gondolier’s song and the rich harmonic overtones of Jewish liturgical music.

Written at the time of Robert Schumann’s love for Clara Wieck and the futile attempts by her father to frustrate the relationship, the B flat *Humoreske* is a work of contrasting moods. The changes are sometimes sudden and unexpected moving from poetic romance to turbulent emotion. Delivered with clarity that was exhilarating, Clare Hammond was always in control of the bravura passages and she never allowed the tender and intimate episodes to become sentimental.

There followed a group of four Debussy *Préludes* including the colourful and exciting display of fireworks in *Feuilles mortes Feux d’artifice* and the huge Cathedral edifice rising and sinking in *La cathédrale engloutie.*

To conclude her programme, Clare Hammond chose a monumental edifice in the form of Rachmaninov’s second Sonata. This work requires the performer to bring together many levels of thought and execution. On one level the pianist needs to build and rebuild the overall structural energy and to identify what Rachmaninov called the “natural point of culmination”. On another level the performer requires a constant and intensive awareness for the elements of timing, weight and technical precision. That Clare Hammond succeeded on these two accounts brought many of the four audiences to their feet and produced a popular encore in the form of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Flight of the Bumble Bee.*

[www.clarehammond.com](http://www.clarehammond.com) [www.concertsinthewest.org](http://www.concertsinthewest.org)

Andrew Maddocks 2019