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TIM HORTON PIANO

17-18 June 2022

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

Tim Horton is one of the UK’s leading pianists, equally at home in solo and chamber music repertoire. His three solo recitals were promoted by Concerts in the West as part of their 2022 season. Tim Horton is a regular performer in various venues and festivals playing with the Leonore Piano Trio or with members of Ensemble 360 based in Sheffield.

Tim Horton’s programme consisted of music by Chopin and Schumann. Two Chopin Nocturnes Op 27 began the evening concerts. The C-sharp minor Nocturne is a good choice to open a recital since its mood feels like the beginning of a journey, uncertain at first, but one that quickly finds confidence in its direction of travel. The middle section is by contrast akin to an energetic spinning top being made to gain in increasing high-octane velocity and power. When the energy is finally spent, the piece resumes its earlier and introspective amblings. The ending perfectly establishes the platform for the rhapsodic nature of the enharmonic partner of the D-flat major Nocturne. Both Nocturnes have commonalities of figuration but the latter oozes far more security and blooms some of the most poignant and embellished melodic lines Chopin ever wrote. Tim Horton’s performance showed his full understanding of the polarity and compatibility of these two Nocturnes.

Schumann’s *Kreisleriana* was the fourth of his piano cycles. Completed in 1835, the character of Johannes Kreisler emanates from the writings of ETA Hoffman. Kreisleremerges as a person with vivid thoughts and dreams as he struggles to find a refuge that will give him the equanimity needed for his work. The elements of restlessness and anxiety, so often present in Schumann’s personality, found expression in the moods of the eight sketches of *Kreisleriana.* The opening vignette is extremely agitated while the second is very inward looking. Of Schumann’s directions for each sketch, the German word *sehr* meaning ‘very’ occurs in six out of the eight, e.g. *sehr langsam* (very slowly); *sehr rasch* (very fast). The writing is heady in dissimilitude of metre, rhythm and tonality. To play a series of ‘mood swings’ requires an alert, dexterous and nimbleness of response from the performer. This was very largely achieved by Tim Horton, particularly the further he navigated through the volatile temperaments.

Three Chopin Mazurkas Op 59 whetted the appetite for what then followed in the form of his B-minor Piano Sonata written in the summer of 1844 while staying at the residence of George Sand in Nohant, central France. Sand wrote of Chopin’s extreme moodiness, irritability and unnerving illnesses while working on his compositions. However, there is little sign of these factors in this Sonata. Perhaps it was his adherence to the conventions of form and melodic and harmonic cohesion that gave a secure scaffold for what emerged. All the characteristics of Chopin that we associate with his nocturnes and ballades are given free expression and rein. Tim Horton was definitely in control of the lyricism, drama and the great sense of elation and sheer joy that Chopin had infused into the sonata’s four movements. His passion for the music was clearly and undeniably communicated to his eager listeners and was rewarded with an immediate and much deserved standing ovation after the resounding close.

These were memorable occasions with numerous calls for Tim Horton’s return as soon as possible to the South-West.

Andrew Maddocks 2022