Concerts in the West 5, 6, 7 June 2014

Lyme Regis, Bridport, Ilminster, Lower Pulworthy

**Alasdair Beatson** *piano*

One of the most distinctive aspects of Alasdair Beatson’s piano recitals is their programming. His choice of works has been described as ‘canny and uncompromising’. Alasdair believes in the power of music to overcome an audience’s preconceived ideas. We, in turn, are convinced by Alasdair’s intensity, demonstrated in his total involvement.

It was a recital in two halves: two twentieth-century works from Eastern Europe, and two German pieces from the first thirty-five years of the nineteenth. Opening with Bartók’s ‘Three Rondos on Folk Tunes’ with their simple but disoriented harmonies and more disturbing low, darker musical ideas, Alasdair moved to the otherworldliness of Janáček’s final piano cycle ‘In the Mists’, which indeed dwells on ‘misty’ keys. We were treated to beautifully phrased shifting chord patterns, before being transported into a series of impetuous styles reflecting the composer’s troubled mind in his later years.

In introducing Beethoven’s late A major sonata, Alasdair shared with his rapt audience his belief in the composer’s optimism, a musical journey from a first movement that avoids the home key, through a lively march, and a profound minor key introduction to a finale that is bursting at the seams. Beethoven was working towards a climax exploding on the then recently extended piano bass note of E. Alasdair’s joy was palpable!

Strangely these days, Schumann’s *Carnaval* seems to have fallen out of favour with pianists. Of its 22 sections, some depict masqued characters from a festival, others his friends or contemporaries and some imaginary, Alasdair gave us a whirlwind guide. In the end we were drawn to ‘Eusebius’, Schumann’s code name for the dreamy side to his own character. The single page of music was repeated as the encore: its right and left hand are rarely in rhythmic agreement, and following its own repeat, as the composer indicates, the playing should be *sotto voce*, veiled and slower, with extreme tenderness. It was the perfect end to a recital which, I sense, will have made a lasting impression.

This was Alasdair’s fifth appearance in eight years in the Concerts in the West series. Quite rightly, he has recently been added to the organisation’s esteemed list of patrons.

ANTHONY PITHER