

ABERDEEN CHAMBER MUSIC CONCERTS
THE SANCTUARY, QUEEN'S CROSS CHURCH

Monday 3rd April, 2023

Kamil Mika Organ and Kara Taylor Cello

PROGRAMME:

J. S. Bach (1685 – 1750)

Toccat, Adagio and Fugue in C Major, BWV564

Max Bruch (1838 – 1920)

Kol Nidrei, op.47 (cello & organ)

Joseph Jongen (1873 – 1953)

Humoresque, op.92 (cello & organ)

César Franck (1822 – 1890)

Choral No. 3 in a minor

Louis Vierne (1870 – 1937)

Carillon de Westminster, op.54, No.6

Pēteris Vasks (b. 1946)

Evening Music (cello & organ)

Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H

Nadia Boulanger (1887 – 1979)

Trois Pièces (cello & organ)

Encore:

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921)

Prière op.158 (cello & organ)

REVIEW:

Monday's recital, bringing organ and cello together was quite unique. It drew what could well have been the biggest ever audience, a near full-house, to Queen's Cross Church. After the concert, more than one audience member said to me that the blend of organ and cello was one of the best sounds they had ever heard. I am inclined to agree with that. Kamil Mika's accompaniments to Kara Taylor's emotionally charged cello playing was perfectly well balanced, swelling when required, then drawing back gently to let the cello soar through deliciously. In the second part of Max Bruch's *Kol Nidrei* for instance, the organ had little kisses of upper organ tones such as could have come from orchestral woodwinds. For me, it created little shudders of pure delight. Kara's playing

throughout this piece delivered every heartfelt emotion bound up in its the two Hebraic Melodies, so full of eastern European flavour. Because of this piece, many people thought Bruch must be Jewish. Actually no. He was a German protestant.

This was only the first of five pieces for the delectable combination of cello and organ that worked so wonderfully well. The four other works in the concert were organ solos, every one of them a dazzling virtuoso piece. Two of them, Louis Vierne's *Carillon de Westminster* and Franz Liszt's *Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H* went beyond that. They were unrivalled organ showpieces proving that Kamil Mika is an absolute star of the organ. If the Queen's Cross organ had a level of consciousness it would have been thinking, "Ah now! THIS is the kind of thing I was intended for!" Kamil Mika opened the concert with a challenging work by J. S. Bach. It has three sections, starting with a whirlwind of a Toccata. Kamil Mika responded to it with the kind of fire-cracker racing fingerwork which was to recur many times during his recital. There followed an extensive pedal solo – absolutely amazing! This must be one reason why I do not remember hearing any other organist in Aberdeen play this piece. For the Adagio, Mika changed to a more reedy set of stops which actually refreshed the music nicely. The Fugue returned us to the full excitement of the opening of the work but with the addition of Bach's unrivalled craftsmanship. With this piece, Kamil Mika got the organ fully fired up for what was to follow.

Let me continue first with the rest of the solo organ pieces. César Franck's *Choral No.3 in a minor* began with contrasting swirls and robust notes. It would be wrong to describe the piece as symphonic regarding its structure but its richness and power developed constantly as the music progressed and deserves such a word. Many of the romantic period French organists aimed at giving their music as much impact as what was written for the symphony orchestra. Kamil Mika's richly coloured performance achieved that brilliantly.

Louis Vierne's *Carillon de Westminster* uses the familiar Westminster Chimes to build a crazy Fantasia on the simple theme. The piece itself is anything but simple however. The chimes come at you from all directions, fired perfectly well together at us in Mika's marvellous showpiece of a performance. Even people who are not keen on organ music would surely have loved this.

The other organ showpiece in the concert was Franz Liszt's *Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H*. In a way, like Vierne, Liszt takes a simple theme, this time just four notes and builds a veritable colossus of a piece with them. Liszt, it has to be said was a marvellous show-off with his fingers on the keyboard. Here he throws down the gauntlet to anyone else daring to perform this piece. Many would fail. Kamil Mika certainly did not. I looked upstairs at members of the Kowal family who were at the concert, they are a family of superb musicians. The looks of delight on their faces is worth more than anything I can write.

Lets move on to the pieces for cello and organ. In these Kamil Mika has a very different job. He is not really in the background, but he needs to blend the organ with a rather more delicate instrument. This he did in a way that it would be difficult to equal. I have referred to the cello as a more delicate instrument and compared with an organ at full blast it is indeed that, but in the musicianly hands (bow and fingerboard) of Kara Taylor we got a marvellously powerful cello performance that matched up to Kamil Mika's playing in every way.

After her wonderfully seductive performance of *Kol Nidrei*, our splendid duo performed a piece by Joseph Jongen who like Poirrot, and indeed César Franck who is usually listed as French, was Belgian. His piece *Humoresque*, unlike the emotionally powerful *Kol Nidrei*, is as the title suggests full of fun. Kara Taylor took hold of that idea splendidly with fingers that capered over the fingerboard and as Kamil's excellent programme note states 'flamboyant' bowing.

Evening music by the Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks had both gentle passages and more muscular music. Apparently it was originally written for horn and organ suggesting an open air feel. I am always reminded when I am told music is for horn of a line in a French poem by Alfred de Vigny we had to learn at school, 'J'aime le son du Cor, le soir, au fond des bois'. I thought that Kara projected something of that open air quality in her performance.

The final piece in the official programme for cello and organ were the *Trois pièces* by Nadia Boulanger. It would be easier to list the composers in the 20th Century who were NOT taught by

Nadia. I was pleased to find her on Monday as a composer rather than a teacher. The first two of the pieces were gentle with transparent organ accompaniment. The third really caught fire and Kara Taylor sold it to us with sparkling good humour. Of course this brought a huge ovation from the large audience. They were richly rewarded with another gentle piece, *Prière* by Camille Saint-Saëns. I think I have written enough now. Let me just say it was every bit as brilliant as the rest!

ALAN COOPER