



## Alexander Ullman

30<sup>th</sup> September 2017

It is early morning in a dark and empty Ardrishaig Hall. A grand piano stands disconsolate in the silence having been unplayed all summer. Little did it know that at 7.30pm that evening it would receive probably the biggest “work-out” of its entire life when the MAAA’s first artist of the ’17-’18 season, Alexander Ullman came to Ardrishaig Hall to deliver a dazzling piano recital devoted entirely to an eclectic mix of transcribed and original piano music by the legendary pianist / composer Franz Liszt.

To devote an entire programme to less well-known compositions by this composer in rural Argyll was a bold decision as, for many, his music is too virtuosic, brash and shallow in content; but, as Alexander explained, where with many other composers their music speaks for itself, with Liszt’s you have to dig deep into the composer’s psyche to truly understand what he is trying to convey. This quickly became apparent with Alexander’s every physical expression demonstrating how completely immersed he was in the smallest change in direction or mood. Yes, a lot of the writing was highly virtuosic – a marvel to witness on its own and delivered with incredible dexterity – but it was rarely the dominant feature, being subservient and underpinning the emotional drive of the music. Listening to the diverse and ravishing sound world that Alexander created brought one a lot closer to understanding the semi-god status that Liszt himself earned from his adoring audiences.

One could write at length on the attributes of each programme item, but what was particularly impressive was a) the way one could “hear” the orchestration in the transcription of Beethoven’s First Symphony – so cleverly executed, b) the intense devotional element of the “Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude” and its beautiful pianissimo passages, c) the menacing and mischievous portrayal of the “Mephisto Walzer No.2” and d) the zany Csardas to conclude. Not content with this “tour-de-force”, the foot-stomping and handclapping audience secured, not one, but three encores – both by Liszt and beautifully executed:- his 10<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Rhapsody and 6<sup>th</sup> Paganini Etude.

Comments from audience members really sum up the evening’s entertainment:- “electrifying”, “stunning”, “spellbinding”, “superb” etc.. It was indeed a roller coaster of emotions, with a young member stating that he found it difficult to breathe because it stirred up so many! All in all this was a truly memorable concert as witnessed by the resounding applause from, and the smiling faces of, the lucky and appreciative audience.

Thank you, Alexander!