



The Sutherland Duo – Chamber Music at its Best.

The MAAA music concert season opened last Saturday with a visit to the Ardrishaig Hall by the Sutherland Duo – Christina Lawrie (piano) and Harriet Mackenzie (violin). Together they offered a generous and well contrasted programme of major works by Schubert- (“Sonatina in A minor”) and Prokofiev (“Sonata in F minor”), followed after the interval by three shorter Tchaikovsky movements - “Méditation, Scherzo and Mélodie”. The final item on the programme was Grieg’s “Sonata No.3 in C minor”, but between the last two items, Christina played Chopin’s “Nocturne in C minor” op.48 for solo piano.

Schubert’s “Sonatina”, despite the title, is a major work, comprising 4 contrasting movements, each one showing the composer’s consummate skill in creating mood and melody. After a stormy, dark, opening Allegro, the strong emotion of the following Andante brought out in full the deep sweet tone of Harriet’s 18th century Italian violin, whilst the following Minuet and Allegro were, in turn, rhythmical, flowing and at times magisterial. Most enjoyable Schubert!

There followed a quite magnificent performance of Sergei Prokofiev’s “Sonata in F minor”, preceded by a perceptive and helpful introduction from Harriet. Started in 1938, the work was finally completed in 1946, needing no less a virtuoso violinist than David Oistrakh to première it. This was intensely passionate and gripping music, full of power and raw energy and making incredible demands on the musicians. However, both artists were fully up to the task, and their total mutual understanding was always in evidence. Winds, bells, firing, the heroism of war, one could read so much into the work, and you felt that the audience was moved and somewhat emotionally drained by the time the fast and furious final bars brought the work to a triumphant end.

In total contrast, the second half brought us Tchaikovsky at his most beguiling. Here, the violin part was very much to the fore – now soaring to its upper reaches, then, cello like, revealing great depth of tone. A delightful whimsical scherzo remains in the mind, and the piano accompaniment was lively and sensitive at all times.

Harriet then took a short rest during the Chopin Nocturne, whose slow opening pace contrasted notably with the ensuing fiery octave runs and final 3 pages at “presto con fuoco” pace. This was piano virtuosity of the highest degree.

And so to the Grieg Sonata – an eminently suitable final piece with which to end this memorable recital. Echoes of the famous piano concerto were evoked – melodies abounded, there was constant ebb and flow, and as ever, violin and piano were flawlessly together in their interpretation of this fine, surprisingly little known work.

The final applause for Christina and Harriet was long and well deserved - a fine opening to the new MAAA music season.

JH