



William Howard

15th February 2014

This concert, the latest in MAAA's season, was given by the much-respected British pianist William Howard.

Before starting the evening's recital, he introduced himself and his musical preferences - predominantly 19th century repertoire; these were reflected in the eclectic mix we were to hear later. This introduction and those preceding each group of pieces were well-delivered, informative and much appreciated by the audience.

The first half of the recital started with a set of short, and rarely performed, pieces by Robert Schumann from his Op.99 Bunte Blätter. These charming and varied miniatures were played with obvious affection and sensitivity. We then moved onto the heart of the first half of the programme - Schubert's "Wanderer Fantasie" in C major D760. This large single movement opus is Schubert's only contribution to the virtuoso piano repertoire and is, in parts, technically very demanding. The piece is based on one of Schubert's well-known songs "Der Wanderer". The four distinct sections of the piece are built around the initial rhythm of the song's opening phrase, albeit reflecting a huge range of tempi and emotion - despair in the minor sections, elation and joy in the major. Although William's rendition of this work was well-rounded, exhilarating and well within his technical ability, it appeared that the base, particularly, of the piano was causing problems. Pianos of Schubert's day had a much lighter touch than our modern-day equivalents, and the MAAA's Yamaha can be quite slow in response making very fast and quiet passages extremely difficult to execute.

After the interval we were treated to three charming pieces by Faure, whose large output of piano music is too little known. The first, Romance sans Paroles, was followed by two of his Barcarolles, Whilst not "flashy" in the late romantic sense, these require considerable technical skill and sensitivity in execution; we received these in equal measure – delightful. William ended with three pieces by his favorite, Chopin. The first of these, the second Scherzo in B-flat min., was delivered with considerable panache. The second, the Nocturne in A-flat Op32 No.2, with well controlled melodic line, gave a brief "quiet before the storm" of the final piece, the much-loved Ballade No.1 in G min. This tightly structured work brought the recital to a dramatic and exciting end.

Following well-deserved rounds of applause from the sizeable audience, we were treated to a heart-felt rendition of Chopin's posthumous Nocturne in C# min. as an encore, This was certainly an evening's entertainment which brought much-needed warmth to an otherwise freezing Ardrishaig Hall.

