



Yuanfan Yang

27 September 2014

In 2012 at the age of 15, Yuanfan Yang was the BBC “Young pianist of the year” and his Ardrishaig Hall recital on September 27th, to open the MAAA concert season, was eagerly awaited. A large enthusiastic audience was treated to a well chosen programme by the young virtuoso, encompassing Chopin, Schumann, Beethoven, Rachmaninov and a delightful rhapsody of his own, inspired by his present tour of Scotland. Each item was introduced by Yuanfan in a mature, friendly manner, which immediately endeared him to his audience.

Chopin’s magnificent Fantasy in F minor, wonderfully spontaneous and full of steely intensity, made a splendid opening to the recital, and Yuanfan’s playing brought out all the richness and complexity of the music’s texture. As a complete contrast, the pianist’s own rhapsody called “Prayers of the North” gave a totally original treatment to a number of well known Scottish airs and was technically amazing! The music was intriguing and joyous in its fluidity.

The first half concluded with a sparkling and utterly spontaneous work from 1834 – Schumann’s “Carnaval” - a series of tableaux in which one character after another takes centre-stage - historical, folklore, the composer himself- the whole being a creative outpouring of love for his beloved Ernestine. Yuanfan’s superlative technique and musical sensitivity ensured that all the passion and inventiveness of this marvellous work was faithfully conveyed.

The second half opened with a late Beethoven Sonata in E (op 109) – a major work which is clearly highly valued by Yuanfan, as indeed it is by his superb teacher, Murray McLachlan. The first part moved from vivace to adagio and finally prestissimo, whilst the second half of the sonata comprised a beautiful expressive theme with six contrasting variations. The famous Beethoven scholar, Donald Tovey, described this Sonata as “one of the profoundest things in music” and it was given a reverential and utterly compelling performance. The vital strong, contrasting rhythms were always present in Yuanfan’s performance and throughout there was total control and clarity in his playing. Rachmaninov’s Sonata No.2, written over 9 months in 1913, was championed by no less a maestro than Horowitz, and it is a work that most concert pianists fight shy of until late in their careers! It is a monumental work, rarely heard, because of its technical difficulty. It was, therefore a unique, experience to hear this immensely grand, virtuoso music tackled so boldly and successfully by such a youthful pianist. The wild, jubilant final section brought this wonderful recital to a triumphant close.

Not quite over, however, as a gentle lyrical piece by Schumann restored the calm and Yuanfan’s own theme and variations on “Auld Lang Syne” provided a final proof of his composing skills and extraordinary technical virtuosity. Much will undoubtedly be heard of this young man in the future.

This concert was repeated in St John’s, Oban, on Sunday 28th and in the Lorn and Lowland Hall, Campbeltown, one day later. In Kintyre also, Yuanfan made his debut as a music lecturer when he gave a highly successful piano workshop for 50 selected primary and secondary school pupils.

John Holt.