



Jamal Aliyev and Jâms Coleman

January 12th 2019

As the lights dimmed in Ardrishaig Hall on Saturday afternoon, and the audience chatter subsided, two young men, dressed entirely in black, strode into view. Jâms Coleman sat at the splendid Yamaha grand piano that for all visiting musicians must be such a relief to see, while Jamal Aliyev carefully set the spike of his very special Giovanni Gabrielli Cello (1756); an instrument re-discovered after a 100 year absence from public performance.

Then the music began and the dark first notes of Beethoven's Cello and Piano Sonata op.5 no.2 in G minor filled the hall. It was written for Count Friedrich Wilhelm, supposedly simplified for amateurs to play. However Jamal and Jâms being master musicians showed the power of this often disregarded piece, to be immense. One of the first works to make piano and cello equal musical partners, it is full of ingenious dialogue between the instruments. The structure is unusual but with such expert performers it delighted the audience who were moved by every turn and twist of this deeply emotional work.

Jâms, from North Wales, after remarking on the three ferry crossings required to get to Ardrishaig via Bute, introduced the next piece, Ernest Bloch's work, 'From Jewish Life'. In a style close to Jamal's heart and heritage, having been born in Baku Azerbaijan, its three elements, 'Prayer', 'Supplication' and 'Jewish Song', are full of the pathos and sorrow felt by the Jewish nation, and also full of the signature augmented intervals and minor key tonality of much of middle eastern music. How beautifully these pieces demonstrated the lyrical qualities of the cello. Jamal's bow searched for all possible nuances of tone and dynamic as his instrument sang from its lowest notes to a seductive soprano register.

The concert continued after the interval with a second Beethoven work. The audience may have noticed a minor kaffuffle at the piano as many pages were rapidly turned before starting. Would it be the 'Seven Variations' for Cello and Piano or the 'Twelve', both being based on themes from Mozart's Magic Flute? The 'Seven Variations' won, being on the theme from the 'Pamina' and 'Papageno' duet entitled 'In men, who know the feeling of love'. This work exhibits Beethoven's practiced ingenuity in the variation form and brought a lighter mood to the programme.

Jâms Coleman introduced the final work, Frank Bridge's Cello Sonata. Jâms told of the 4 years of torment for the composer as he struggled to express his feelings about the First World War, finally finishing the composition in 1917. The adagio in the piece caused the composer the most difficulty as he struggled with ambivalence about his own pacifist views. Jâms and Jamal dealt with the challenges of this complex work which tracks huge changes in the world of music composition that were underway at that time. Again the lyrical powers of the cello came to the fore as did the virtuosic requirements heaped on the pianist. Despite its undoubted innovations this piece generously reaches out to its audience. Bridge uses the new musical freedoms only when justified, being happy to return to more traditional tonal stability in the lyrical sections.

Fulfilled but not overburdened by the weightiness of the final piece, the audience managed to applaud Jamal and Jams back to the concert room to perform the 'Swan' from Saint-Saens 'Carnival of the Animals' as encore. This piece so beautifully confirmed the excellence of Jamal's playing and the superb quality of his quite special instrument.

Robert Lacey