

## Matthew McLachlan Performance Reviews

The High Peak Orchestra, St John's Buxton. 14 July 2018: Brian K W Lightowler

Highlight of both this evening's concert was undoubtedly the Tchaikovsky 1st Piano Concerto performed by Matthew McLachlan. At 18 years of age, Matthew has an impressive catalogue of musical achievements behind him. He quite evidently has a musically motivated family and whilst one reads about his educational opportunities at Wells and Chetham's and his prodigious success in exams and key prize winnings, recent years have seen him promoted in numerous recitals with repertoire firmly securing his place in top professional ranks.

We rarely hear playing of Matthew's calibre in Buxton even from the celebrities. He is in full command of the magnificent grand piano which was tonight generously provided by Kawai. As a sign of genius his playing seemed effortless whilst in pulling out all the dynamics and virtuosity of this extremely demanding piece, which is only contemplated by but a handful of the top pianists internationally.

The first movement of Tchaikovsky 1 starts with bold chords from the horn chorus, very exposed, oh well. Then the big sound statement, chords up and down the keyboard with huge panache and flamboyance left us in no doubt about the flavour for the piece to follow. The tempo was taken at a brisk pace adding a brilliance to Matthew's performance. As the 2nd subject launched by the piano, the accompanying strings were only just hanging in there, and throughout the piano lead the way with the diabolically difficult runs played with pin-point accuracy to dramatic climaxes with the accompanying orchestra close on his tail. The dramatic and furious double octave passages contrasting the drama of sudden serenity with the leggiero passages evoking mountain streams or whatever, were absolutely brilliant. The dramatic heavy brass entry, nicely in time with 3 trombones, 2 trumpets (and a curiously vacant seat for this piece), taken up by the strings valiantly sawing away was exciting enough until the powerful piano entry totally upstaged the band, taking the piece into overdrive. And then with amazing composure Matthew returned the hall to tranquillity.

The second movement did allow the orchestra have a moment of glory with lovely flute solo stating the theme beautifully, backed with a clear tone from the oboe and the 2 cellos on the front desk adding a very smooth melody. The prestissimo section again gave the floor to pianistic virtuosity. The third movement which has echoes of Eastern European folk tunes sounded tricky with some quick interjections “round the band” following the rapid fire phrases from the piano. Sounded like a game of “throw and catch the ball” at break-neck speed. Great fun to listen to and wonderfully done. I think the orchestra would have been happier with a steadier tempo and again the strings were just about hanging in there but it was worth the pain! In this gargantuan piano work with arguably the best writing in the repertoire, at the grand finale, just as it seems to be all over the piano comes back with some more excitement and in Matthew’s case to “bring the house down”. A sigh of relief that the band didn’t disgrace themselves in the presence of a virtuoso. Matthew McLachlan is a name to look out for!

### **Three piano recitals in one day, Friday 17th May**

Orkney Arts Society has just concluded its winter programme with three piano concerts by Matthew McLachlan, son of Murray who did the opening recital way back in October. Because of his pedigree, Matthew’s superb technique and musical sensitivity were no surprise but his eagerness to share this with youthful joyfulness was a delight.

The first concert was in the Cathedral as part on the ONFA Constitution Day Celebrations. This followed a superb lunchtime concert in St Magnus Cathedral Stromness Academy and used the wonderful Steinway which belongs to the St Magnus Festival. He played the famous Satie Gymnopedie, then the Bach Rachmaninov Suite in E, then the lovely Grieg Nocturne from his Lyric pieces.

In the afternoon, in Stromness, he played a programme of shorter pieces to suit a children’s audience, one as young as five weeks, and we also heard three teenagers, Christa Bevilaqua, Ross Thomson and Dharma Madrigal, play the Fazioli which is maintained by Orkney Arts Society.

A friend commented that she didn't know anywhere else in the world where a pianist would play a children's concert in the afternoon of an evening recital and that it's no wonder there's such musicality in Orkney. There was hardly a peep from the young audience during Matthew's wonderful performance.

At the other end of the spectrum, Matthew also gave an impromptu house recital to two older members of the Art Society who weren't able to come to the main recital. This main concert, which was in the evening in Stromness, was much more demanding but Matthew never flagged.

His programme started with the Bach Rachmaninov Suite, then the famous Bach Busoni Chaconne. In the second half we heard two major works: the Chopin Fantaisie in F Minor and the Liszt Sonata in B minor.

Matthew said that the Steinway and the Fazioli were the best pianos he had ever played so it would be great if he could come back to delight us with more concerts.