

Catherine Coulter-Young and Richard Shaw

Favoured with an excellent acoustic and a recently donated grand piano courtesy of Markson Pianos, the beautiful church of St Mary Magdalene's, Munster Square, was the setting for an intimate recital given on the evening of Saturday the 19th June by Catherine Coulter-Young and Richard Shaw, in aid of the Karakol Orphanage in Kyrgyzstan. At a glance the programme seemed well balanced, a good mix of old favourites and newer works. If anything I wondered whether the second half lacked a nice 'meaty' piece as its focus. I needn't have worried. Right from the start, Coulter-Young's relaxed, engaging manner ensured that she had the audience entirely in her hand. Repertoire choices were executed intelligently and with style and, impressively, entirely from memory.

The rapport between the performers was immediately obvious. Shaw is a fine pianist, providing sensitive yet soloistic accompaniment, and the balance was consistently excellent. Hamilton Harty's fantasy *In Ireland* (1915) opened the concert. An apt nod to 'the homeland' in Coulter-Young's words, this was played with warmth and the folk elements were brought to life imaginatively. The *Adagio* and *Allegro* from English composer John Stanley's *Solo V* (1745) contrasted well with the Harty. Coulter-Young's simplicity of phrase and variation of vibrato and tone colour in the *Adagio*, and sprightly assurance of the florid semi-quaver passages in the *Allegro* were very enjoyable to listen to.

The recital continued with one of the best known and loved pieces in the flute repertoire: Poulenc's *Sonata*. This piece was written with Jean-Pierre Rampal in mind, and was premièred by him at the 1957 Strasbourg Festival, having been commissioned by the Coolidge Foundation in memory of American chamber music patron Elizabeth Coolidge. It was performed with a fresh approach and great attention to detail. The performers' choice of tempi and tone colours enhanced Poulenc's quirky, dramatic writing, and they created effective atmospheres in all three movements.

Griffes' *Poem* was next in the programme. Originally for flute and orchestra, flautist Georges Barrère who premièred it in 1919, made this arrangement for flute and piano. The expansive, improvisatory mood of the opening suited Coulter-Young's sound very well. Her performance was evocative and well-thought-out; her interpretation certainly captivated her audience. The first half ended with Ian Clarke's *Zoom Tube* (2001). A definite audience pleaser, Coulter-Young pulled this off with aplomb. Every effect was delivered with ease, and I was impressed with the sense of style she brought to the performance.

Martini's *Scherzo (Divertimento)* literally kicked off the second half. This work is an arrangement of the third movement of the *Sextet for piano and woodwinds* (1929). An infamously difficult piece, Coulter-Young and Shaw performed this with impeccable technique and poise, the expressive lyrical sections contrasting very well with the 'cheeky' scherzo mood. I enjoyed the two movements from Bach's *Sonata in E Major BWV 1035* (1741). Again, Coulter-Young's phrasing and direction in the *Adagio ma non tanto* was lovely, as was her crisp articulation and technical control in the *Allegro*. Another favourite came next in the programme, the *Fantaisie* by Gabriel Fauré (1898), one of many similar works written at the turn of the Nineteenth Century as test pieces for the Paris Conservatoire. Coulter-Young's performance of this was very refreshing, creating a serene, yet mysterious mood in the slow movement, and making light of the technical demands of the upbeat fast movement. Following the Fauré was an arrangement of Manuel de Falla's song

*Nana*, based on a traditional Andalucian lullaby and, as, Coulter-Young informed us, was sung to a baby who had died. It was exquisitely performed. The lack of applause at the end showed how moved the audience were by it and, for me, it was the best moment of the recital.

Another of Ian Clarke's works, *Hypnosis*, came next. Written down in 1994, this is a re-working of tracks that were improvisations between Clarke, David Hicks and Simon Painter during 1986-8. Coulter-Young's performance enhanced the improvisatory qualities of this piece, her expressive phrasing and variation in tone colour ensured that her audience was again held completely rapt. The final piece in the programme was the second movement of Liebermann's *Sonata* of 1987, marked *presto energico*. Coulter-Young demonstrated formidable technical control and the demands of this piece were more than met. Always energetic in style, she performed this extremely confidently. The encore was an expressively performed *Ashokan Farewell*, composed by Jay Ungar in 1982, and was a fitting end to an immensely enjoyable recital.

Helen Manente