



Magic Yet Again

Oliver Poole's July 15th Recital

By Jack Woolford



Although the Connaught Hall was cruelly stifling (needing air-conditioning much more than a refurbished organ) and only half-full (perhaps because of the new ticketing arrangements), Oliver Poole's incredible 15-year-old mastery of the keyboard and astonishing maturity of interpretation were even more evident. With beautifully printed programmes replacing the normal programme notes, he again delighted us with a double recital, for which tickets at - say - the Wigmore Hall would have been £25 to £50: though Wigmore could not have out-Connaughted the vigour and volume of heartfelt applause and cries of joy.

Part I began with Mendelssohn's "Variations Serieuses", new (I am told) to Oliver but 75 years old to me, and cherished as a melancholy masterpiece. Serious, indeed, but a far from slow sequence of variously styled variations in melodically linked but harmonically and emotionally contrasting sequences. The climax demands highest technical virtuosity and simultaneous passionate emotional commitment, not to mention fantastic feats of memory in the fingers. Needless to say ...

I have reservations about Liszt. A genius, a super-brilliant pianist, a prolific composer but lacking an unmistakeably personal style in every bar (unlike, say, Bach or Beethoven) and inclining to theatrical, not to say melodramatic, showers of notes and triplets galore. However, pianists delight in his pyrotechnics, whispers and thunders, and the Sonata in B Minor certainly tests them to its lengthy utmost. Needless to say ...

Part 2, in fact a complete second recital, was inspirationally but unsurprisingly dedicated to Chopin (1810-39) to whom, as the portrait on the programme revealed, Oliver himself has at least a resemblance in profile. Confronted with myriad mazurkas, polonaises, preludes and waltzes (etc, etc, etc), he chose only two ballades, two scherzi and one étude, all composed before Chopin was thirty (out of 39) but all passionately Polish and characteristically innovative in style, harmony and form, in the service of his uniquely personal gift of melody. Apart from the Op 25 Étude in C sharp minor, played with the most delicate, lightning, fairy-like touch I ever heard, Oliver revealed to perfection the tragic intensity of the already fully-matured composer's genius. Thanks, Oliver! It was more than magic. It was a miracle.

Brahms next?