



presents

Antony Peebles - piano

Sunday 7th March,
Otumoetai College Performing Arts Centre,
Windsor Rd, Bellevue, 4.00pm

Antony Peebles

The first half of the programme is devoted to two composers, Beethoven and Schubert. Though they both lived in the same city (Vienna) at the same time, it is almost certain that they never met. Beethoven was virtually God in Vienna while Schubert was only known to a relatively small circle. Indeed those of his works that did get played in public were for the most part works that are never played nowadays. Probably the closest the 2 composers ever got to each other was at Beethoven's funeral - a vast public occasion - when Schubert was awarded the hugely prestigious role as one of the pallbearers.

Beethoven died in 1827. Schubert died the following year, 1828. In that very year the 17-year-old Liszt had his first serious love-affair. The girl, Carolyn de Saint-Cricq, was ordered by her eminent father never to see the young musician again when he learnt that he had been with his daughter till the early hours of the morning. Liszt had made a fatal mistake: he had failed to tip the porter who had shown him out, so the aggrieved man went and notified his master. Both Carolyn and Liszt were intensely grief-stricken, and the latter, who always had a strong pull towards the Church, responded by spending many hours on his knees in the church of St Vincent de Paul. There he made the acquaintance of the resident organist, Chretien Urban. Urban was, for 1828, a rather rare phenomenon: an ardent Schubert fan, and he proved to be a significant catalyst in turning Liszt into one too.

For the last 170-odd years it has been universally accepted that many of Schubert's songs have an unassailable place amongst the very greatest compositions in music. But in 1828 when Liszt started leafing through them hardly anyone knew of their existence. Coming across this treasure trove must have made Liszt feel a bit like Howard Carter when he came across the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922.

Liszt went ahead with transcribing no less than 55 of Schubert's songs, turning them into solo piano pieces. As most of these transcriptions were done in the 1830s, they are amongst the first things that Liszt created, predating most of his own original compositions.

While Beethoven and Schubert died within a year of each other, Chopin and Liszt were born within a year of each other (Chopin 1810, Liszt 1811). Both were born in Eastern Europe but neither could resist the magnetic pull of Paris. Unlike Beethoven and Schubert in Vienna, Liszt and Chopin were close friends in Paris. Liszt and Chopin were very different personalities. Liszt was an extrovert showman, while Chopin was emphatically not. Liszt's piano playing had a force and bravura that was entirely absent from Chopin's. Liszt had a voracious

appetite for literature, while Chopin, despite being cultivated and witty, had little interest beyond his music. While Liszt throughout the 1840s gave an unbelievable number of public concerts all over Europe - to the immense chagrin of his mistress Marie d'Agout - Chopin gave less than 20, and did so with a notable absence of relish. Chopin came most into his own at sophisticated dinner parties and other small aristocratic gatherings in Paris where he would go to the piano and improvise. His playing had a strangeness, a poetry, a brilliance and a dark-hued emotional intensity that entranced all who heard it. Whenever he played he was adored, and, like Beethoven in Vienna, his funeral in Paris was huge public event.

That just leaves Debussy: how does he fit in? Well he as a young man played to the old man Liszt in Rome. (Liszt listened to every aspiring performer or composer, gave them all lavish encouragement and would quite often assist them financially.) But a bigger influence on Debussy was - curiously - Wagner. And Wagner had been a very close friend of Liszt's and had learned many of his musical ideas from Liszt. The wide gulf between the French and German psyche has often been noted, so it is curious to reflect that Debussy - so quintessentially French in his refinement - should have had such an enthusiasm for Wagner - so quintessentially German in his big-boned heaviness.

Antony Peebles was educated at Westminster School and - with an exhibition in music - at Trinity College Cambridge. After gaining his MusB there he studied piano with Peter Katin, receiving scholarships from various sources. He has also studied with Yvonne Lefebure (on a French Government scholarship) and Jeremy Siepmann. In 1971 he won the BBC Piano Competition with a unanimous vote from the jury. In the following year Mr Peebles won the Debussy Competition in France. Since then he has maintained a very busy performing career and has now performed in, astonishingly, 131 different countries. The most recent additions to the list were Rwanda, Armenia and Libya in 2006. At home in the UK he has played as concerto soloist with the following orchestras: London Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, Halle, City of Birmingham Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, BBC Welsh Symphony, City of London Sinfonia.