

Concert Review

Liam Wooding – Solo Piano for Tauranga Musica

Sunday, May 4, Baycourt X Space

Well done to Tauranga Musica for inviting dynamic young NZ pianist Liam Wooding to perform on Sunday 4 May at Baycourt X Space.

Liam hails from Whanganui, is now based in Perth Australia and has just returned from a year in America as a Fulbright scholar. He presented a challenging and varied programme to a warm and receptive audience. Baycourt's X Space proved an intimate and inclusive setting with a delightful backdrop and a warm wrap around seating plan.

The concert opened with Bach's Prelude and Fugue in A flat Book 2. Bach wrote 48 Preludes and Fugues in two books of 24 each – two in every major and minor key. Wooding's sunny interpretation of the Prelude gave a warm and gentle invitation to the Fugue that followed. Although in A flat major the fugue moved into autumnal minor keys with subtle nuances of tonal colour portrayed clearly by Wooding.

Haydn's F minor Variations showcases a rare display by Haydn of unease and pensiveness in a minor key. Wooding's controlled finger dexterity and agility highlighted the more joyful passages of these Variations with sparkling semiquaver runs and arpeggios complimented by shimmering trills coupled with delicate lyricism. The finale returned to a more sombre feel alternating with hopefulness and concluded with a major chord suggesting a brighter future. This was well captured in Wooding's sensitive performance.

Wooding continued exploring F minor with one of Chopin's most popular compositions the F minor Fantasy. This Fantasy unfolds in one continuous movement again contrasting complex emotions in true fantasy style. Chopin is well known for his love of his Polish homeland and Wooding took the audience along with him as he explored the variety of moods and experiences reflected in this Fantasy. A masterful execution of long romantic phrases portrayed a wonderful sensitivity from this young pianist. Heartfelt oohhs and aahhhs at the end of the Fantasy showed the audience's absolute enjoyment of this piece and of how superbly it unfolded under Wooding's intuitive finger work.

The second half opened with three delightful Gershwin showtunes arranged by American pianist Earl Wild. Liam immediately captured the audience with his relaxed and reflective playing of Lady Be Good creating luxurious, enveloping

waves of sound. This moved to toe tapping swing rhythms with The Man I Love finishing with a soulful Embraceable You.

The afternoons concert culminated spectacularly with Liszt's monumental Sonata in B minor. Here we saw Wooding at his finest in full control of the vast range of technical and emotional demands required by a work of this grandeur. Often described as the greatest post classical sonata this work is jam packed full of bold contrasts – tumultuous ecstasy and passion – glamorous runs and menacing chords – and sweet moments of delicacy and simplicity. Liam's obvious connection to the emotions of this wonderful sonata were most evident. Bravo Liam!

Fiona Hare & Kathy Stewart
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