

SEEN AND HEARD RECITAL REVIEW

Beethoven, Prokofiev, Schumann, Debussy and Rachmaninoff:

Martyna Jatkauskaite (piano). Wigmore Hall, London. 30.11.08 (ED)

This recital marked Lithuanian pianist Martyna Jatkauskaite's Wigmore Hall debut, awarded as part of her first prize in the 2007 Jacques Samuel Intercollegiate Piano competition. Her burgeoning career, not least in her home country, is currently balanced by post-graduate study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

If the over-riding impression she created across the works of all five composers she played was one of strength of tone, physical power and integrity of conception, then it says much for her well defined technique and ability to stamp authority on practically every statement she makes at the keyboard.

Beethoven's 32 variations in C minor, WoO 80, is a work not without its problems of structure, which the composer himself admitted. Jatkauskaite rose unhesitatingly to the technical challenges the piece posed, as she did throughout the evening, and made much of the opportunities to produce rich and robust fortissimo playing, leaving one in no doubt that she sees Beethoven as a composer struggling with form and his own creative instincts.

As a composer, Prokofiev could be tongue-in-cheek when the mood took him, but *Sarcasms*, as the name suggests, delves deep into the most caustic recesses of his character. Martyna Jatkauskaite brought these out by pouncing on the angular rhythms within the five movements and highlighting the contrasts between the characters inherent in each, for example, the first came across as neo-romantic, whilst the second mixed neurosis with the distant perfume of Debussy in its more introvert moments. Throughout however, there was solidity in the bass register which gave the music no lack of gravitas or emotion.

Schumann's *Etudes Symphoniques* – ever a challenge of form and integration of structure for pianists – closed the first half. The sequence of étude variations was powerfully and persuasively shaped to emphasise the drama within the work's complex structure. There was an ever-present sense of adventure in the playing-off of more lyrical moments against the strongly articulated chordal writing upon which so much depends when making the most of the music.

Three movements from Debussy's *Images Book I* provided an opportunity for more relaxed playing at the start of the second half. *Reflets dans l'eau* nevertheless was laden with emotional meaning in its power to suggest something approaching the sexual. *Hommage à Rameau* found Jatkauskaite negotiating the intricacies of Debussy's sarabande-like adopted style with relative ease, whilst *Mouvement* explored rhythmic interplay in a hypnotic sense that was not dissimilar to Ravel's *Bolero*.

All this though was in many ways but a prelude to Rachmaninoff's second piano sonata, which concluded the recital. Little doubt was left throughout the three movements that Jatkauskaite carries with her an innate understanding of the work, and possesses the technical and musical ability effectively to link the emphatic first movement and ever increasing power of the finale via the reservation that is to be found in the middle movement. For me, this formed the work's core in an emotional sense, out of which the grand passions of the conclusion were allowed to grow. Careful never to push the piano past its limits or to effect an unmusical tone, Jatkauskaite's performance was at once showy yet unassuming and characterised by powerful music making yet never losing a sense of overall control.

Martyna Jatkauskaite, I suspect, will be a pianist well worth following in the future.

Evan Dickerson

EASY GRACE

*Martyna Jatkauskaite plays Mozart and Schumann,
enjoyed by ROBERT HUGILL*

Martyna Jatkauskaite is a young Lithuanian pianist who is currently studying at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama. In November 2008 she won the Jacques Samuel Intercollegiate Piano Competition which gave her as prize a Wigmore Hall recital, a concerto performance in London and a recital at the Fazioli Concert Hall in Sacile, Italy.

For her concerto performance she appeared on Thursday 19 March 2009 at the Cadogan Hall, with the London Festival Orchestra conducted by Ross Pople. They played Mozart's Piano Concerto No 24 in a concert which formed the third of the 2008/09 S W Mitchell Capital Virtuoso Piano Series. This series of concerts has become an annual event at the Cadogan Hall and each concert takes a distinctive form; distinguished soloists are accompanied in a concerto by the London Festival Orchestra but the soloist also plays a substantial solo item. So that on Thursday, in addition to the concerto, Jatkauskaitė played Schumann's Symphonic Etudes, Opus 13.

The concert opened with J C Bach's Sinfonia Concertante in G for two violins, cello and orchestra. This work was written for one of Bach's own London concert series and was premièred by him in London in 1772. Known only from incomplete copies, the full manuscript recently re-surfaced in Mantua, thus allowing it to be performed as J C Bach intended. The work is scored for the solo group, strings, oboes and horns; though nominally about the two solo violins and solo cello, the work is in fact far more diverse, as the composer introduces all sorts of other solo moments. It is a sunny, attractive work and was given in a lively and incisive performance by the London Festival Orchestra. The various members of the orchestra, including the violas, made the most of the solo opportunities that Bach gave them. In fact the whole work seems to have been about exploring the variety of different textures that this particular combination of forces could provide. Rather strangely, the three movement work ends with a *Menuetto*, making one wonder whether Bach had intended it to end with a further movement.

In style, J C Bach's writing is far closer to that of early Mozart than J C Bach's distinguished father. The work is akin to one of Mozart's early symphonies and nothing like J S Bach's orchestral suites. In fact J C Bach was an important influence on Mozart and it would be interesting to hear more of his work.

Mozart's Piano Concerto No 24 was the last but one of the group of twelve which Mozart wrote for Vienna in the 1780s. Piano Concerto No 24, in C minor, is dated 24 March 1786, and Mozart premièred the work two weeks later. Like all his works in minor keys, the piece has a depth and seriousness to it which is lacking in some of the sparkling major key pieces. Written for a large orchestra, the piece

has a positively symphonic character. The London Festival Orchestra played the work with relatively small forces, under twenty strings, which gave the opening an incisive and lithe character. But Pople and his forces ensured that Mozart's dark, passionate colouration was not neglected. Jatkauskaite's first piano entry displayed both poise and clarity. This continued throughout the piece. She displayed easy grace, never attempting to be over showy, but also never trying to make the piano part more 'Sturm und Drang' than it really is. This was a performance which, despite modern instruments, was firmly anchored in the 1780s rather than viewing the concerto as a pre-cursor of Beethoven's heavier ones. There were many felicitous aspects of Jatkauskaite's performance, but what I find I come back to is the grace and clarity of her playing, aptly matched by her platform manner.

Jatkauskaite opened the second half with Robert Schumann's Symphonic Etudes (*Etudes Symphoniques*), Op 13. If the music of the Mozart concerto had seemed deceptive in its elegant simplicity, the Schumann was firmly in the virtuoso camp. In this work, Schumann composed a series of variations on a theme provided for him by Baron von Fricken (who was the guardian of the real Estrella from *Carnaval*). Each of the movements is a study, which taxes the pianist in some different way, exploring the possibilities of the piano. They are symphonic in that the pianist is required to deliver a positively orchestral wealth of colour and texture



Martyna Jatkuskaite at Cadogan Hall

Jatkuskaite's performance had all the virtues of her Mozart, allied to a secure technique and an enviable power in the stronger passages. Clarity and grace are not necessarily the adjective which you would think to apply to Schumann's taxing studies, but Jatkuskaite certainly brought them to bear on this difficult music. Her performance was romantic without ever being stressful, her power and virtuosity were held in the service of the music rather than showing off for its own sake.

The programme finished with a performance of Boccherini's Symphony No 6 in D minor, G506, *La Casa del Diavolo*. This symphony dates from 1771, during Boccherini's early sojourn in Spain, and the score remained in Madrid until it was lost in a fire in 1936. An early French edition describes the work as representing Hell in imitation of that which is included in Gluck's *Stone Banquet*, and it is very much Gluck who is called to mind in the work. Like the J C Bach work which opened the concert, Boccherini's symphony

seemed to delight in the variety of textures which the composer could call forth from his relatively small orchestra.

The London Festival Orchestra seemed to relish the diabolic challenges that Boccherini set them, and gave us a crisply sparkling account of the work, which made me determined to listen to more Boccherini.

This concert was notable for Martyna Jatkauškaite's poised concerto performance. But Ross Pople and his orchestra ensured that there was plenty of musical interest and fine playing in their orchestral contributions, the whole adding up to a satisfying evening. There is one more concert left in this series, when Piers Lane will be playing Mozart's Piano Concerto No 22 on 14 May 2009.

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Guildhall School of Music & Drama Gold Medal

Wednesday, May 05, 2010 Barbican Hall, London

Reviewed by Peter Reed

Shares



In his speech before the awarding of the Gold Medal for 2010, Jonathan Vaughan, the judges' chairman and the GSMD's director of music, linked the value of the School's most glittering gong to the three soloists to another group of soloists engaged in a similar process of election. It isn't stretching the point too much to point out that the winner, the Lithuanian pianist Martyna Jatkauškaite wore a stunning royal blue gown; that the second prize went to the Romanian pianist Diana Ionescu, who was sporting a red flower on her elegantly simple black dress; and that the third prize went to the Irish cellist

Brian O’Kane, whose beautiful cello was made of a light, orange-coloured wood. Prophetic or what? At the time of writing, only time will tell.

It soon became clear that Martyna Jatkaukaite, a seasoned recitalist, was bound to win. Her dazzling, fluent and self-assured virtuosity servicing Prokofiev’s predominantly extrovert Third Piano Concerto did give rise to the thought that placing it last in the programme (which made musical sense) might have given her the edge in the event of any judicial dispute. Her aristocratic brilliance, full of punchy, rhythmic verve, suited this show-off work to the hilt, but for all her regal dispatch of the concerto’s extreme demands, Jatkaukaite wasn’t too posh for some purely visceral heroism, especially in those tension-building semiquaver tornados in the first movement. In her head-down, I’m-the-soloist way, she was stunning, and it was no surprise that she swept the board in a very un-hung way. Before this voter commits, though, he’d like to hear her in music less furiously diamantine and emotionally straightforward.