

SOUND FESTIVAL 2011
SCOTTISH ENSEMBLE and ALASDAIR BEATSON Piano
THE MUSIC HALL, ABERDEEN
Sunday, 23 October 2011

The addition of three very short pieces by the young Scottish composer Martin Suckling only just qualified Sunday evening's Aberdeen performance by the Scottish Ensemble to be a contributor to the Sound festival. Actually two pieces in their Scotland-wide programme were special arrangements by leader Jonathan Morton which perhaps qualifies them as contemporary and Stravinsky is still regarded by some as "a bit too modern for me". In some ways Stravinsky is the musical equivalent of Picasso since his compositional style had its quite separate "periods".

The Scottish Ensemble began their programme with an exceptionally clean and precise performance of a piece characteristic of the composer's "classical" period, the Concerto in D. A lightness of touch with the flighty rhythms of the opening movement, beautifully transparent playing in the second and a wonderfully incisive finale showed the Ensemble on their top form.

This was followed by the first of Morton's excellent special arrangements, Mendelssohn's Capriccio and Fugue from Four Pieces. The Capriccio concludes with a brilliant fast paced fugue played in sizzling style but one of the real highlights of the concert was the following slow fugue, more than just a fugue, a beautifully expansive movement in itself.

It was back to Stravinsky in the second Morton arrangement of the evening, the Concertino composed originally in 1952. Also representative of the pared down scoring of the classical period this wonderfully gritty piece harks back in some respects to *Le Sacre* with its use of bitonality and incisive rhythms. It was composed in France where as Jonathan Morton explained Stravinsky was not particularly happy as the noise from French holiday makers kept him awake at night. Perhaps this piece was designed in Baudelaire's words "pour épater les bourgeois". It would certainly have done that then and maybe in just a few special cases even today.

After the interval, Jonathan Morton welcomed pianist extraordinaire Alasdair Beatson to the Hall floor where the piano had been wheeled in and together they played the three short pieces of Martin Suckling's *Three Venus Haiku*. There are several versions of this music including for piano and cello and piano and flute and this version for piano and violin worked very nicely indeed. The opening section had an angular violin solo violently punctuated by the piano. The middle section was very brief before the more sturdy angularity of the expansive concluding section.

To follow, Jonathan Morton and Alasdair Beatson made a perfectly matched virtuoso coupling in Mendelssohn's Concerto for Piano, Violin and Strings in d minor written when the composer was only fourteen years old.

For my personal taste the opening movement and the Adagio are a bit too sweet though the soloists and the Ensemble gave a magnificent account of Mendelssohn's music – but then there was the finale with the composer's signature outpouring of

torrents of notes – a real virtuoso showpiece, it received a performance of unparalleled brilliance especially from Beatson and yes, from Morton too. I wonder who does his choreography by the way. Several times I thought he was going to take flight. No wonder the audience nearly combusted with their applause for these marvellous soloists and the Ensemble.