

Alexej Gorlatch
Wigmore Hall

I sat there absolutely enraptured. I hardly think anyone has any doubts on that score. This was already the epitome in playing that promised a great career ahead, with all that goes alongside – drama, poetry, an innate sense of rhythm and expression encompassed by structural understanding – coupled with a true feeling for rubato, that brought each work alive. For one so young at 22, it quickly denoted his mastery in a variety of composing styles that, in turn, brought confidence and élan together for the occasion. The audience started cheering from the outset, and never once relented! Successes at the Vladimir Horowitz, Kiev and Chopin, Warsaw Competitions really started the ball rolling, but the Hamamatsu, Japan, and German Musikpreis – the first time for a pianist in the last 15 years – then the Beethoven Audience Prize in Bonn, and the International Anton Rubinstein, consolidated everyone's faiths and opinions. The latest, the Dublin Inter-

upward thrust, complete with its musical turn of phrase in the third measure. 'I am here to Stay'. One imagines Beethoven, the pianist pressing home his statement! Our artist complied, his dashing bravura – piano eventually resulting in fortissimo, as the argument progressed – had listeners gasping with admiration. The Adagio F major-minor movement, a paraphrase of continuing beauty – at the time almost beyond concept – enchanted throughout, while the minor key Menuetto, with its three-note answering figures and accompanying Trio in the major, brought out the composer's charm and effrontery. It sounded freshly etched. The Prestissimo finale, though, realised Beethoven's revolutionary treatment at the time of writing. Haydn could hardly compete with this, and Alexej went to town, enhancing every dynamic contrast stemming from the composer's original sketches. Everyone went wild.

Chopin's Polonaise-Fantasie in A flat, Op.61. Conceived three years before the close of the composer's life, it is his Masterwork, even eclipsing the F minor Fantasie. My two preferences in recent years have been Richard Goode, and Idil

collected material right, bang smack on the line. 'With Drums and Pipes,' – historically correct, 'Barcarolle' – nothing of the dreamy Offenbach, here, 'Musettes' – where Bartok recaps his opening movement visions with musing simplicity, 'The Night's Music' – which encapsulates those weird creatures that haunt our imagination, with a David Lean type-scan mirage of peasant folk arriving, then receding into the distance, and 'The Chase', literally teeming with an effrontery of ideas that outdoes his own Allegro Barbaro, and similar solo piano pieces by Prokofiev and Khachaturian. Wow! It certainly received exactly the correct treatment, Gorlatch alternately bouncing into space, then relaxing in the quieter asides. I have never heard such performance clarity, before this.

Finally, Chopin's Etudes, Op.10 with its exploitation of key ranges between C major and C minor over 12 separate numbers. No composer had ventured such daring quite on this scale before, even those contemporary with Frederic Chopin. Each number glistens, saddens and delights with strong counterparts of other obvious emotions, in between. Although more popular than the other, later Opus 25 set,

places him highly among his national contemporaries.

His programme opened with Bach's C minor French Suite, which was quite superbly performed, technically perfect and infused with keen intelligence. Schumann's Arabeske and G minor Sonata were from a later era, of course, into which Mr Hirai fitted admirably: this was a clever juxtaposition of these two works, the first leading naturally to the greater power of the second. We then had a group of original compositions by the pianist himself, in

which the expressive character of his *Valse pathétique* and *Three Recollections* made his sympathy manifest, so beautifully is his music laid out for the keyboard, as is his earlier *Hommage a Chopin* a finely subtle composition which prefaced a concluding set of Chopin pieces – Polonaise, Mazurka, Nocturne – before a winning account of the C-sharp minor Scherzo. A most excellent recital and we look forward to seeing this fine artist in London again soon.

Alexander Leonard

Motoki Hirai
Cadogan Hall

The dreadful earthquake in Japan earlier this year has led to several concerts by musicians anxious to raise money for the victims, and the appearance by the Japanese pianist Motoki Hirai at Cadogan Hall on May 25 was one of the latest given in such a worthy cause. It would have been well worth attending had not such a natural disaster happened, for he is a very gifted player whose artistry

ity, early on. I would prefer to be discrete with my comparisons during recent years. Igor Tchetuev was the more dynamic, but our young Musician-Virtuoso described here, the more questing in his overall appraisal.

Two further Chopin encores: the very sad Mazurka in G minor, then the overplayed, but immensely popular Polonaise in A flat major. Finally, for his supporters insatiable pleasure came Debussy's *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest*, which nearly blew the Hall's roof off! An immense recital by Dublin's 2009 Competition Winner.

Bill Newman

Michael Collins and Piers Lane
Wigmore Hall

To close his year-long Wigmore Hall residency Michael Collins on May 5 gave a recital in partnership with Piers Lane that was deeply satisfying and also mildly exploratory. The idea was that heavyweight pieces should come first with lighter essays following, yet it did not work out quite like that. A start was made with Brahms's second Clarinet Sonata Op.120 No.2, which begins with his last sonata movement, a very subtle one, this being followed by his final scherzo and set of variations. The playing was fully worthy of this music and as always one admired the warmth and richness of Collins's tone in all registers.

Next came perhaps the only real clarinet-and-keyboard precedent for Brahms's

