

University of
Edinburgh
Concerts

1970-71

PIANO RECITAL
ROBERT SHERLAW JOHNSON

THURSDAY 25 February
Reid School of Music

ascending from the note C. These crystallise into an energetic theme played by the quartet, and since the movement is not far removed from classical sonata form in its outline, (nor indeed are the other two,) it may be more profitable in these few lines to insist upon the unity of the work, rather than upon its diversity which is on the most generous scale, and which will speak for itself. Perhaps the melodic tendency to revert to a single note throughout so many moods and contrasts may be the musical expression of that inner certainty which is such a recognisable feature of this composer. C.K.

Next concert: Thursday 18 February

REID MEMORIAL CONCERT

THE REID ORCHESTRA

KENNETH LEIGHTON *conductor*

PETER WALLFISCH *piano*

Mozart

Symphony no. 31 (Paris)

Piano Concerto in E flat, K.482

Haydn

Symphony no. 95 in C minor

the hope of
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Part two
two bars
precious
grey goose
husband
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discuss
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Print

LISZT 1811 - 1886

Ballade no. 2

Die Trauer-Gondel I & II

ALKAN 1813 - 1888

Quasi-Faust

Interval

ROBERT SHERLAW JOHNSON b. 1932

Piano Sonata no. 2

MESSIAEN b. 1908

Pieces from *Catalogue d'Oiseaux*

La Chouette hulotte (The Tawny Owl)

L'Alouette-Lulu (The Woodlark)

Le Merle bleu (The Blue Rock Thrush)

The final version of Liszt's second Ballade was completed in 1854. The two pieces entitled *Funeral Gondola* were written in 1882. They were inspired by the sight of the funeral gondolas in Venice, and were written a few months before Wagner's body was to be carried in the same way after he died there in February of 1883. Although Liszt does not abandon tonality altogether in these two pieces, neither can be described as being *in* a definite key. Both pieces are based on the same musical material.

Alkan's piano writing is quite different in style from his contemporaries Liszt and Chopin, being more orchestral in conception and owing rather more to Berlioz than to Bellini or Wagner. *Quasi-Faust* is the second movement of his *Grande Sonate*, Op. 33, written in 1847. Each movement of the Sonata represents different stages in a man's life, the second depicting him at the age of 30. A theme—very loud and forceful—representing the devil appears shortly after the opening and the whole movement suggests the man's conflict with temptation over which he finally triumphs.

Robert Sherlaw Johnson's second piano sonata was written in 1967 and first performed at the Harrogate Festival in the summer of that year. It makes use of sounds derived directly from the strings of the piano as an extension to those produced in the normal way, on the keyboard; the structure of the whole grows out of the integration and interaction of the two types of sound. The short first movement is played entirely on the keyboard. The second movement repeats the material of the first movement in a different order with the addition of commentaries played on the strings of the piano (mainly with hard and soft drum-sticks). The third movement begins on the keyboard and gradually incorporates 'inside' sounds (played mainly with the fingers), until an equal balance is obtained between the two—inside and keyboard—in the last section of the movement. The movements follow without a break.

Messiaen's *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* was written from 1956 to 1958 and ranks as his greatest piano work to date. Besides using material based on bird-song, Messiaen also derives certain musical ideas from different aspects of nature such as the sea, and rock formations. In notating birdsong he has never made use of a tape-recorder, preferring instead to notate directly on to manuscript paper 'comme une dictée du solfège' (as he himself has said). It is his intention not only to approximate as closely as possible to the contours of the original birdsong, but also, in this work, to capture the natural setting of the song, as well as its emotional overtones as he perceives them. It is his intention to compose an artistic transformation of nature rather than an imitation of nature.

The first two pieces evoke different aspects of the night. The first—*The Tawny Owl*—begins with a passage representing the night itself, followed by a strophe based on the calls of various owls: the little owl, the long-eared owl and the tawny owl. Both the opening passage and the strophe are repeated in extended versions and followed by a coda based on the call of the tawny owl which is like 'un cri d'enfant assassiné'. Messiaen writes in his introduction to the piece: "... the voice of this bird provokes terror. I have often heard it in the middle of the night, about 2 o'clock in the morning in the

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wood of Orgeval, of St. Germain en Laye . . . Darkness, fear, the heart beats too quickly, the caterwauling and the yelping of the little owl, the cries of the long-eared owl: and now the cry of the tawny owl: sometimes mournful and sad, sometimes indistinct and restless (with a strange trembling), sometimes loud and terrifying like a cry of a murdered child! . . .” Whereas this piece presents the mysterious and terrifying aspects of night, the following piece *The Woodlark* contrasts the calm liquid song of the woodlark with the brilliant and sharply contrasted patterns of the nightingale. The scene is set beside the great wood at Saint-Sauveur en Rue, in le Forez. High in the sky, in the darkness, the woodlark is heard, approaching and receding, and the nightingale answers from the wood.

The third piece, *The Blue Rock Thrush*, is set by the sea on the south coast of France. The opening chords represent the cliffs, which are contrasted with the cries of the swifts. The introduction is followed by four strophes, each presenting a different realisation of the song of the blue rock thrush. This song is contrasted with the sound of the waves and, in the third strophe, with the rapid twittering of the thekla lark and the harsh cries of the herring gull. Each strophe is followed by a refrain—very slow and calm—representing ‘la mer bleue’. R.S.J.

Next concert: Wednesday 3 March

Usher Hall, 7.30 p.m.

UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY CHOIR

THE REID ORCHESTRA

PATRICIA HAY ALEXANDER OLIVER
JOHANNA PETERS RONALD MORRISON
RAYMOND MONELLE, *conductor*

MENDELSSOHN

Walpurgis Night, opus 60

STRAVINSKY

Les Noces

Tickets from the Edinburgh Bookshop

Printed

19

University of Edinburgh Concerts

1970-71

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster, Austin Patterson
Victor Manton, David Edwards

PHILIP GREENE *clarinet*

THURSDAY 11 March

Reid School of Music
