

Carnegie Hall Review

Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall – March 10, 2008

In a recent recital of works ranging from Haydn to Del Tredici, Kimball Gallagher made a strong impression as a pianist of extremely diverse interests and abilities. His biography lists not only numerous performances and prizes but also two organizations he has founded to promote salon concerts and educate young pianists. He is evidently something of a dynamo, and the fact that his program was intelligent, innovative, and ambitious should come as no surprise...

Opening with Haydn's Sonata in A-flat Major Hob XVI: 46, Mr. Gallagher proved he thinks logically and architecturally. He brought cohesion to the opening Allegro Moderato, which too often suffers from its many twists and turns. The exquisite Adagio movement did not quite show the lyricism that its imitative trills seem to invite, but its directness had much to say for it.

Four Chopin Mazurkas followed, in C Major (posthumous), A-flat (Op. 41, No. 4), B-flat (Op. 7, No. 1), and E Minor (Op. 41, No. 2). Gallagher's forthright style seemed best suited to the B-flat Mazurka, but all formed a good bridge to the same composer's Sonata in B-flat minor, Op. 35 (the "Funeral March"). The Sonata showed excellent control, though somewhat more straightforward and less demonstrative than many performances. It had a solid conception.

The pianist seemed most in his element in the second half's newer repertoire. The world premiere of David Del Tredici's Ballad in Lavender opened, a highly pianistic work in a quasi-improvisatory style. With a quoted melody from Schumann's Kreisleriana and elements of Brahms and Liszt, it certainly reflected the neo-romantic sensibility for which Del Tredici has become known. Gallagher seemed very comfortable with the work and projected strong commitment to it.

Another US premiere followed, Nolan Gasser's Three Jazz Preludes, which were just what the title suggests. Gallagher spoke eloquently about the work, mentioning parallels to Gershwin's Three Preludes and a Chopinesque quality in the second Prelude. Here again, the pianist impressed with his sure command of difficult new repertoire. Bravo!

The Griffes Sonata, last, was brilliant and polished enough to have gone straight to disc, unedited. The pianist described Griffes as "tough-minded" and "visionary;" given the strengths of this recital and the huge achievement of its two premieres, one might use the same two adjectives to describe Mr. Gallagher himself.

A large audience demanded an encore, and Gluck's Melodie followed, too stretched for this listener, but showing expressiveness.

Rorianne Schrade