

January 2012

LONDON

Tim Homfray reviews a selection of recitals at the Wigmore Hall

Violinist **Nicola Benedetti** drew a packed house for her lunchtime recital (10 October). With pianist Alexei Grynyuk as a strong and empathetic partner she opened with a tempestuous account of Beethoven's C minor Sonata op.30 no.2. Her playing was clipped, with biting accents. In the scherzo, bright and crisp, she was verging on ponticello, and the finale was passionate and stormy. At the emotional heart of the performance, the Adagio cantabile was exquisite and perfectly judged, with judicious use of vibrato or, quite often, none. Brahms's G major Sonata op.78 was similar. The outer movements had a constant subtle interplay of light and shade with shafts of radiant tonal sunlight breaking through, built around a slow movement of remarkable intensity.

Each year the Swiss ambassador to the UK awards young musical compatriots with a series of concerts around the country. This year's recipient was cellist **Lionel Cottet**, who appeared on 19 October partnered by a previous winner, pianist Louis Schwizgebel-Wang. They opened with Beethoven's F major Sonata op.5 no.1, in a light and genial performance, full of sparkling detail, with a dash of rapt reveries in the short Adagio near the end of the first movement. In the duo's own arrangements of five Schubert Lieder, Cottet provided a suitably eloquent range of voices, with a beautiful sotto voce at the end of *Ave Maria*. Gregorio Zanon's ...and still there is room to fill, which was receiving its world premiere, is a

short, two-movement work, attractive and beguiling. Flowing solo cello passages and warm melodies mark the first movement, and the second is upbeat, humorous and syncopated. Cottet and Schwizgebel-Wang performed it with wit and style. There was panache in their performance of Brahms's F major Sonata op.99, with some hell-for-leather playing in the last two movements and a wonderful, childlike innocence to the Adagio affettuoso.

The following evening, violinist **Janine Jansen**, with pianist Itamar Golan, launched into Grieg's C minor Sonata op.45 with a vengeance. Drama, vehement passion and ecstatic song ran through the first movement. They produced effective, hushed playing in the central Allegretto and some wonderfully deft touches in the finale. It all sounded terrific, but it was perhaps a

little too overheated. Messiaen, in his *Thème et Variations*, demands even more passion and ecstasy, and got them in a powerful display of slow, sustained lyricism. Richard Dubugnon's Three Pieces are sensual and evocative. Jansen performed them with style and warmth. The last of them pays homage to Ravel, whose own mature Sonata followed. After a first movement of cool and disciplined beauty, Jansen enjoyed herself, as all violinists do, with the bendy notes of the 'Blues' movement. Her bravura dash through the Perpetuum mobile finale was a thing of wonder. Some of Dubugnon's music seemed like a distant cousin to Szymanowski's *Mythes*, so it seemed apt that Jansen should play the first of them, 'La fontaine d'Aréthuse', as an encore, laced with more of the ecstasy that had threaded through the evening, and some marvellous filigree playing.

Violinist **Veronika Eberle** opened her lunchtime concert (24 October) with a reflective, intimate account of Debussy's Sonata, sensitively abetted by pianist Shai Wosner. The gentle first movement seemed akin to one of the composer's more exquisite piano preludes, from which she emerged thrillingly into an outburst of brilliant G major. The second movement, too, occupied a sensual, dreamy world, which gave way in the last movement to energy and purpose, a terrific ending to an intriguing, multicoloured performance. Bartók's First Violin Sonata also had its moments of whispered magic, but this is tougher, more fibrous stuff, which Eberle performed with both power and delicacy, rendering Bartók's lines supple and vivid, and showing expressive agility in the upper reaches of the G string.



Genial Beethoven from Lionel Cottet

VERA MARIUS