

WOODEND MUSIC SOCIETY
In association with SOUND 2015
ROHAN de SARAM: Cello
SUREN de SARAM: Percussion
RYAN DRUCKER: Piano
WOODEND BARN
Thursday, 29 October 2015

Cello virtuoso Rohan de Saram is a long running regular favourite at **sound** and indeed at Woodend Barn as well. For today's concert, he brought with him his son, percussionist Suren de Saram and an absolutely brilliant young pianist Ryan Drucker. The programme was introduced as being centred on classical music over the centuries all with strong folk inspiration. This was particularly evident in the first movement of Schumann's Fünf Stücke im Volkston (Five Pieces in Folk Style) Op. 102 played by percussionist Suren de Saram with pianist Ryan Drucker. All five pieces were originally intended to be played by Suren but after the brittle and exciting opening movement which worked splendidly well using a xylophone, the predominance of longer held notes would have required the use of a marimba or vibraphone which was not available. The opening movement was very much in the mood of a joyful folk dance played with a marvellous sense of verve, energy and precision by Suren de Saram.

The rest of the work was played as the composer had intended by cello and piano. Rohan de Saram is renowned for his ability to draw so many different voices from his instrument. This gave us a delightfully gentle and song-like slow movement and a marvellous third movement which Rohan de Saram suggested was a kind of recitative - an idea well underlined by Ryan Drucker's pointed little gestures on the piano. The fourth movement opened and closed like a German march with a softer centre while the finale, in similar form, suggested a robustly sung folksong.

Following on from Schumann's piece, Ryan Drucker offered a thrilling performance of Bartók's Solo Piano Sonata BB 88. The music is tonal yet powerfully dissonant and in its day was surprisingly new and exciting. The opening movement was played quite fast with Ryan Drucker giving a hard driven yet brilliantly precise performance. Dangerous leaps were all perfectly navigated and fingering on the keyboard was often quite dazzling, terrifying even.

The slow movement marked *Sostenuto e pesante* had well considered and forceful playing.

It was the finale though that had the most obvious folk inspiration in its melody but the virtuosic piano writing goes well beyond that.

The final piece before the interval was the six movement Suite Populaire Espagnol by Manuel de Falla. Once again Rohan de Saram used the huge range of contrasting voices of his cello to bring out the dazzling Spanish colours of this music. There was an entrancing lullaby, Nana, a bright song in Canción, a taste of exotic flamenco in Polo, the dreamy muted Asturiana and the Jota, a dance from Aragon with the cello providing pizzicato decorations for the piano holding the melody before this instrumental arrangement was reversed.

The piece which followed the interval was closer to what we have been used to in Rohan's performances for **sound** - his Improvisations based on traditional music of

Sri Lanka. This was performed along with surprisingly delicate percussion, often mirroring or boosting the cello supplied by Suren de Saram.

The cello part, as Rohan explained, exploited the natural harmonic series of the upper cello strings on which much of the music concentrated. Bowed cymbals fitted nicely along with the cello sounds and there was a constant rhythmic pattern provided by apparently a tambourine but I could not see how it was being played. The work began and ended with very soft breathy sounds on cello with more powerful music from both cello and percussion in the middle. This gave the piece a thoroughly satisfying formal structure.

Eloquent playing on both cello and piano illuminated Fauré's attractive *Élégie* for cello and piano and then came the third and final movement of Kodály's *Sonata for Solo Cello*, Op. 8. Here was the most openly virtuosic cello playing of the concert – it had everything in the way of technical special effects and in his performance of this movement Rohan de Saram's playing really took fire. He seemed to enjoy playing it as much as we enjoyed listening to him.

An enthusiastic response from the audience brought forth an attractive encore: the *Intermezzo* for cello and piano by Granados – how splendid!