

SOUND 2013

CONVERSATIONS WITH ROHAN de SARAM Cello WOODEND BARN, BANCHORY

Friday, 01 November 2013

Master cellist Rohan de Saram has been associated with **SOUND** almost from its birth and he is a patron of the Festival. Friday's early afternoon event at Woodend Barn was designed to celebrate the recent publication of a book by Joachim Steinheuer *Rohan de Saram "Conversations"* – a portrait of Rohan's musical life from early years in Sri Lanka to the present day. Rohan de Saram knew and has worked with a host of celebrated composers and performers almost throughout the twentieth century and up to the present day. Mark Hope, Chairman of Woodend Arts is also a Director, Treasurer and co-founder of **SOUND**. He introduced Rohan and acted as interviewer in a conversation which elicited some fascinating details of the cellist's life in music and some of the people he had encountered during his six-decade long career. These included two elderly ladies the Deneke sisters with whom he stayed in Oxford and who had been part of the Schumann – Brahms coterie. One of the sisters, Margaret had been a piano pupil of Eugenie Schumann, one of the daughters of Clara and Robert Schumann. None other than Albert Einstein was one of the regular guests at the musical salons of the Deneke sisters often playing with some very famous musicians. I for one never knew that! Kodaly, Shostakovich and Poulenc were just a few of the celebrities whom Rohan knew very well. During the early part of his career he played mostly the baroque, classical and romantic repertoire and it was later on that he expanded his reach to become one of the world's greatest exponents of advanced and avant garde music for cello. As part of the afternoon's event Rohan gave us a taste of his extraordinarily wide repertoire.

He began with the Prelude from J. S. Bach's Sixth and final Solo Cello Suite. His wonderfully supple and muscular playing held the broad span of Bach's writing easily within his grasp. This was followed by a startlingly colourful performance of James Dillon's Eos for solo cello. Here the sound palette goes way beyond that used by Bach and yet, especially towards the end of the work, something of the structural rigour of Bach lives on in Dillon's music. Is this because Dillon was thinking back to Bach or perhaps because Bach somehow manages always to sound amazingly up to date? In either case Rohan de Saram delivered both pieces to the audience at full value as the glorious classics for cello that both are.

After the second part of the conversation with Mark Hope which dealt with Rohan de Saram's discovery and exploration of the contemporary repertoire and its composers he played another two pieces. The Sarabande from Bach's Fifth Cello Suite sounds deceptively simple compared with the following piece, the dazzling Finale from Kodaly's Sonata for solo cello. Rohan surprised us when he said after a real firecracker of a performance of the Kodaly that it is actually the apparently simple Bach that he finds more challenging. Well, that is one of the performer's secrets that he was letting us in on. To us non cellists the Kodaly sounded much more challenging and yet to be quite frank Rohan de Saram seemed to be equally relaxed and at home with either.