

MICHAEL Mc HALE: Wigmore Hall June 28 2010

Irish Heritage organised yet another outstanding evening of great classical music on 28th June when the young award-winning Belfast-born pianist Michael Mc Hale delighted a large audience at the Wigmore Hall with a varied and formidable programme of solo piano pieces from the Classical, late Romantic and contemporary repertoires.

Mozart's lively and playful 1783 *Sonata in B flat* was a fitting start to the evening, beautifully chromatic and beguilingly dissonant, with an exciting and joyous finale.

Two short companion pieces by the Irish composer Ian Wilson were next, *For Eileen, after rain*, a thoughtful and contemplative study, and the livelier and technically more demanding *Sonnenwende*.

Liszt's violently passionate *Ballade No 2* with its dark menacing chord sequences and alternating moods was handled with extraordinary technical precision and absolute control, and closed the first half of the evening.

After the interval, tragedy, loss, torment and great tenderness all came together in Brahms's poignant and beautiful set of *Four Ballades* from 1874, undoubtedly the high point of the concert. The virtuosic challenges thrown up by each of these deceptively lyrical pieces were competently met by the pianist with clarity, precision and a subtle combination of power and delicacy.

Rachmaninov's notoriously complex and multi-textured *Etudes-tableaux* 1917 require considerable mental dexterity and tireless hand movement. Mc Hale however exercised total control throughout over both his material and his instrument in each of these pieces to round off a triumphant and hugely impressive Wigmore Hall debut.

For encore we were treated to a beautiful and haunting rendition of the incomparable *My Lagan Love*, in a (to me) unfamiliar arrangement, which I suspect may have been the performer's own.

The excellence of the Wigmore Hall acoustics and the presence of a discerning and appreciative audience made this a never to be forgotten musical evening.

Michael O'Sullivan: July 2010