

Jamie Walton and Daniel Tong.

18th November 2016

Those of you who braved the dreadful weather to attend the performance last Friday evening in Minehead Methodist Church were rewarded with a delightful evening. The concert, the second promoted this season by the Minehead and West Somerset Arts Society, was given by Jamie Walton, cello, and Daniel Tong, piano, who played an interesting programme of works, some well-known and others new to many of us. The two artists were at school together, and the benefit of this long association showed, right from the beginning of the recital, in the instinctive rapport they had with each other.

Jamie is lucky enough to play a Guarneri cello dating from 1712. Its lovely tone was evident from the opening theme of Beethoven's Cello Sonata in G minor, Op 5 No 2. The first movement, marked adagio, leads into an exciting allegro where the two instruments alternately predominate. Beethoven was only 26 when he wrote this sonata, and it is less complicated than his later works, but very attractive, full of lovely tunes.

The next work was Debussy's Sonata, a staple of the modern cello repertoire commonly regarded as one of the finest masterpieces for the instrument. Jamie told us that it was written shortly before the composer died, and showed indications of a change of direction which might have blossomed if he had lived. The artists did the work full justice, and many of the audience, hearing it for the first time, loved it, and hope to hear it again.

After the interval came a piece by Janáček based on an epic poem by the Russian author Vasily Zhukovsky - The Tale of Tsar Berendyey. The piece, called Pohádka, which translates as 'Fairy Tale', presents scenes from the story. The music exploits the cello in unusual ways, particularly at the start of the second section, where pizzicato notes contrast with the piano, and many of the sounds are made by the bow tapping on the strings.

The final work was Shostakovich's Sonata in D minor, Op 40, another piece written early in the composer's career, during a period of emotional turmoil for the composer, not least because of the political situation in Russia at the time. The first movement opens tunefully, and seems in a more conventional mode, but the short second movement is full of rage and dissonance, enabling the artists to show off their excellent technique. Again, the sonata had the audience talking about hearing a previously unknown piece.

As an encore the artists played Fauré's *Après un Reve*, a dreamy, tuneful piece which sent us all home contented.

I first met Jamie and Daniel early in their careers, when they each, separately, won a debut recital at the Wigmore Hall promoted by The Worshipful Company of Musicians, of which Jamie is now a Freeman. It was good to hear how well their careers are progressing.

JML