

Jack McNeill (Clarinet) and David Quigley (Piano) - September 25th, 2014

Stunning Opening to Carlisle Music Society Season In classical musical terms, this was the tale of 'local lad made good' – very, very good indeed. Trinity School alumnus, clarinettist Jack McNeill made stellar progress through local music groups and then the Birmingham Conservatoire . He then became a freelance performer with luminaries such as Sir Colin Davis at the Aldeburgh Festival and played with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. At this opening concert of Carlisle Music Society's new season, he was accompanied by the globe-trotting Irish pianist, David Quigley. What a combination! The youthful duo gave the audience at St Cuthbert's a varied and sumptuous feast of the very highest standard.

First was Malcolm Arnold's Concertina. This moved from spiky jazziness to a 'Furioso' finale. In between was an andantino, in which Jack displayed extraordinary expressiveness, with the purest of tones, when playing pianissimo at whatever pitch in a clarinet's registers. He is an absolute master of dynamics, moving effortlessly from triple piano to fortissimo in a split second – or carefully displaying the unique mellifluousness of the clarinet in a spine-tingling crescendo, whether over a single note or a liquid cascade of semi-quavers.

Second came the rich romanticism of the Saint-Saens' concerto. Jack played it with exquisite apparent ease, conjuring up a range of magical moods in the lento before giving a virtuoso display of the Weber-like arpeggios and scales before a return to haunting tunefulness. Jack's finger-gymnastics in Lutoslawski's Dance Preludes and then Herbert Howells' sonata were awesome, mixing passion with sublime serenity. There followed Edwin Roxburgh's solo pieces for clarinet, the engaging and inventive Poulenc Sonata in B flat before a jazzy encore by Bartok.

Jack must be one of the finest musicians Cumbria has produced. Further, as a former BBC Radio 2 Young Folk Award finalist, playing guitar, he is clearly a multi-talented lad.

The next Music Society concert at St Cuthbert's (23rd October) will be given by prize-winning Russian-born violinist Adelia Myslow with Craig White on piano (details: www.carlislemusicociety.weebly.com).

Ted Cole