

HELLENSMUSIC 2019

REVIEW by *Spencer Allman*

A Warm Glow on a cold May Evening

Once again at the start of this (decidedly chilly) May the Hellensmusic festival provided a week-long programme of classical music at Much Marcle, in the heart of the splendid Herefordshire countryside.

On Friday evening Christian Blackshaw, one of the event's Artistic Directors and an internationally celebrated pianist, gave a recital of works that span several eras.

Bach's *Partita in B flat* of 1726 is the first of six such suites of stylised ancient dances for keyboard. Its crisp angularity seemed to harmonise with the starkly beautiful lines of the village church, the concert's venue on this occasion.

Blackshaw's was an intense, moving account.

Next up was the *Fantasia in C minor K 475* by Mozart. Frequently serving as a prelude to the *Sonata K 457*, a far more substantial piece, tonight we heard it as a stand-alone. Its simplicity is an invitation for the performer to bring something to it. Our pianist accomplished the task beautifully, making something quite magical out of the final bars.

The last item in the first part was Schubert's *Drei Klavierstücke*, whose duration and depth almost reach sonata proportions. The first in the set is a classic example of Schubert's knack for turning a seemingly trite tune into something quite complex. But these piano pieces tell another story: as is often the case with this composer there is something forlorn stirring amid the drama.

On the basis of this reviewer's past experience, Christian Blackshaw is an inspired Schubertian, and this interpretation of *Drei Klavierstücke* only strengthened this conviction.

The sole item following the interval was *Humoreske*, written by Schumann in 1839. The title is something of a misnomer, as the work's seven sections reflect a variety of moods, all held together cleverly through the recurrence of thematic patterns. *Humoreske* is probably overlooked: it is a tribute to the organisers' sense of adventure to include music in this festival that may well be unfamiliar to some members of the audience.

Tonight, Mr Blackshaw took us deftly from the High Baroque through to the height of the Romantic Age. And it was in that period we stayed for the encore, a tender rendition of the last movement of Schumann's *Fantasia*. The applause was still audible as I made my way through the twilight to my car.