

ANDY FINDON

BFS-RAM PREMIER FLAUTIST RECITAL

Andy Findon (flute) with
Geoff Eales (piano)
DUKE'S HALL LONDON
16 FEBRUARY 2014

Strictly Come Fluting: The Dancing Flute

The sky was blue, the trees remained unbent, all was calm. For what felt like the first and only time of 2014 so far, it was a nice day. And just as the sun dipped below the Georgian rooftops of Marylebone, the occupants of Duke's Hall were about to experience *The Dancing Flute*. In the latest instalment of the BFS Premier Flautist Series of concerts, Andy Findon was to treat us to something quite rare: a complete programme of brand new flute and piano music by a living composer. However the composer, Geoff Eales, was not nervously sitting in the audience waiting to stand up at the end, but rather he was at the piano, and so the insight, intentions and rhetoric instilled into this selection of music were guaranteed authentic.

In true dancing style, we began proceedings with Quick; Slow; Quick-Slow-Quick with the lively 7/8 time signature *Eternal Dance*; the haunting slow waltz *Remembrance*, and the fiercely virtuosic,

rhythmically complex (and terrifyingly unison in long passages) *In The Pocket*. Indeed, when I googled the term 'In the Pocket' the following day, I discovered from UrbanDictionary.com that it means: "When two or more people play musical instruments together, with or without a vocal accompaniment and are perfectly on-beat, never missing a note or going off tempo in any way." It was already clear even from these first three of twelve works; we were in for something very special.

In all honesty, Andy caused a few double-takes on his arrival onstage, as it's fair to say that he is not looking quite like 'himself' at the moment. His previously famed, one might even say trademark 'Shorn Identity' (hopefully Andy will excuse the film pun) is no more, and one could be forgiven for not quite recognising him with his full beard. However, the one thing that is truly unmistakable is Andy's terrific playing, which was as usual, a display of flexibility, virtuosity, versatility and consummate musicianship.

Those unfamiliar with Geoff Eales (a legend of the studio/jazz piano worlds) would quickly discover that Andy would be complemented in all these respects with the seemingly boundlessly energetic and effusive playing that would

all but leap from the bowels of the Steinway.

As is customary with single-composer concerts, as an audience we were gradually familiarised with the sound-world and idiosyncrasies of Eales' oeuvre. The rhythmic playfulness; the tremulous harmonic beds of clustered chords that complements the tessitura of the flute so well; the agony and ecstasy of tension and release, discord and resolution. But our interest was held ever more keenly due to the augmentation of the solo-line timbre through the use of (a mere fraction of) Andy's multi-instrumentalism.

So in the somewhat sultry yet lachrymose *Lochria's Rhumba* we had Alto Flute; for the sweetly innocent *In the Eyes of a Child* Andy took up the Penny Whistle; the aptly named (for the week) *Force 11* was a violent piccolo masterclass; the ethereal, then groovy, then ethereal again *Dreaming of Arcadia* was perfectly enhanced through the use of two Indian bansuri, and *Ice Maiden* featured bass flute. The personal favourite of the evening for me was the wonderfully characterful tango *Farewell Patagonia*. This piece, with a subversive nod to Geoff's homeland of Wales is a very welcome addition to this area of the flute repertoire previously only notably occupied by the

works of Astor Piazzolla and Jacob Gade.

Throughout the programme, the fiercely technical, and rhythmically convoluted passages that would make many accomplished professional flute players blanche were executed with nonchalance, enthusiasm and good humour. Equally, softer, moodier, more delicate lines were taken to places that lesser technicians might consider risky, but in the hands of a master craftsman like Andy Findon, we had nothing to fear.

The ebullience, bonhomie and musical trust that were evident on stage were also remarkable – Geoff seems to enthuse physically about every note of his music – showing genuine pleasure when it really gets cooking. Andy also beamed at the many particularly subtle, beautifully structured or cheeky bits of Geoff's playing (a mischievous quote from *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring* in *Song for my Mother* for example) in the various piano solos that were sprinkled throughout the pieces. Indeed, sometimes in the jazzier moments in the programme, it felt like Duke's Hall should have been remodelled into a somewhat grander Ronnie Scotts – with round tables, candles, cocktails, spontaneous ripples of applause and (artificial) smoke to really set the scene.



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In true dancehall style, the last piece in the programme *Pan Dance* was another Quick-Slow-Quick – again, an irregularly time-signatured masterclass in versatility – with playfulness and exactitude residing perfectly comfortably with each other – an encore was demanded and given in the form of Geoff's own setting of Chick Corea's *Spain*, and an informative, entertaining Q&A session followed.

This was not just a great flute and piano concert; this was also an introduction to a whole raft of creative, accessible, complex, interesting, heartfelt and good-humoured new flute and piano music. As enjoyable as it was to hear this selection of music in one sitting, especially with these two wonderful musicians delivering the goods so effectively, I very much look forward to hearing some

of this magnificent music peppering the programmes already inhabited by Bach, Reinecke, Prokofiev, Mouquet and Poulenc. Luckily, due to Astute Music (www.astute-music.com) this is a possibility and a good deal of the music played in this concert is now available to buy. Where there are occasional competitive or curricular demands on 'music written in the last ten years', the options have

just been increased – and by a Brit too! And just in case you'd like to know how it all goes, there's a recording of all of this music on Andy and Geoff's CD *The Dancing Flute* which is available from Andy's website, iTunes or your favourite flute shop. Enjoy; we did.

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