

LUNCHBREAK CONCERT
WINNERS OF THE OGSTON PRIZE 2010 & 2011
ALISON GORMLEY Soprano
KERR SLAVEN Saxophone
COWDRAY HALL
Thursday, 19 April 2012

The competition to find a winner of the University of Aberdeen Ogston Prize for 2012 will take place in the Cowdray Hall on Friday, 27th April. As a prelude to that event, this week's Lunchbreak Concert presented a two part concert featuring the winners of the prize in the years 2010 and 2011.

Almost any words chosen by me to describe Thursday's concert, no matter how eulogistic and enthusiastic, would seem to detract from what we actually heard. Sometimes mere words are not enough. The four BBC Concerts earlier this year stood well out in front of anything else this season but Thursday's performance in both its halves certainly mounted a powerful challenge.

Alison Gormley's performance was memorably superb when she won the Ogston Prize in 2010 but since then her voice and her musicianship have matured and developed to perfection. Her voice has a compelling purity and freshness that allowed her to include in her performance H. Fraser Simpson's song Christopher Robin is saying his prayers. The childhood innocence of this song lends itself, especially in our more cynical world, to parody and even contempt but Alison was able to deliver the song completely straight in a way that would surely melt the most hardened of hearts. I can think of no other singer even among children who could have succeeded so brilliantly and movingly as this. The inclusion of this song set the seal on the amazing breadth of repertoire that Alison is able to cover. Her opening choice, *Fac ut Portem* from Rossini's *Stabat Mater* showed Alison's remarkable vocal range as well as her natural ease and facility. There are a couple of treacherous leaps in the score from high to low notes. These were achieved perfectly without strain of any kind and the whole performance of this piece was so delightfully natural and fluent.

Donizetti's Neapolitan Canzonetta *Me Voglio fa'na casa* was a wonderful sparkling sunlit fountain of music while *Le Retour* by the French composer Lili Boulanger was soft and caressing. After H. Fraser Simpson's childhood song, delivery of Ivor Novello's *The Land of Might-have-been* was going to be no challenge at all for Alison and so it proved. In her recital she was ably accompanied by her mother Susan.

Roger Williams took over as accompanist for the other performer, saxophonist Kerr Slaven. Here was another superb Ogston winner whose playing and musicianship have developed almost beyond belief. The two composers whose works he chose are relatively obscure but a performance such as the one given by Kerr (and Roger Williams) lifted them up alongside the greats. The *First Concertino* by Georges Guilhaud originally published in 1910 for oboe and orchestra has become a favourite with saxophone players. Kerr Slaven's performance proved that the instrument, most often associated in our times with jazz can be a very fine classical instrument. Kerr's playing was sheer perfection. Like Alison's singing, it flowed easily and naturally. It was almost as if the instrument was a part of the performer's body and was in no way separate from him. The more romantic music of Guilhaud was followed by the more edgy *Sonata for alto saxophone and piano Op.29* by the American pianist and composer Robert Muczynski. Here, in Kerr Slaven's performance, was virtuosity personified. Usually, even with the finest performers, it is possible to seize on one or two tiny faults, but here, I could find no such thing and it was great to hear that from his performance of an equally challenging piano score, Roger seems to have fully recovered from his accident and is back on top form. Bravissimo everybody!