



# Summer CONCERTS

## PAUL WEE AND DAMIEN FALKOWSKI

Introduced as 'two of Gray's Inn's finest treasures', these two barristers opened this year's series of concerts in a full Chapel. The first piece was a four-movement fantasy by Franz Schubert, titled 'Fantasie in C major', Op 15 (D 760) (better known as the 'Wanderer Fantasy'), which was performed by Paul Wee. Many consider this to be Schubert's most technically challenging composition for the solo piano, yet Paul captured the audience from the first chord. Particularly striking was the lack of a score in sight – one cannot help but be impressed by the mastery required to play such a piece from memory.

Composed in late 1822, each movement effortlessly flowed into the next, with each new beginning signified by a variation of the opening phrase of his lied 'Der Wanderer', D 489. As Paul played, the audience was struck by the quick changes in tempo and the way his entire body was engaged. While some watched in amazement, others listened with eyes closed. No doubt, however, all were captivated. As the piece storms to its conclusion, it clearly makes increasing demands on the performer's technical and interpretive powers. In the end, the shouts of 'wow' and 'bravo' could hardly capture the appreciation of the audience.

Next we saw Paul and Damien perform Sonata No 5 in F major, Op 24; a work which was published in 1801 and became known as the 'Spring Sonata'. Damien began with the violin introducing a bright theme which was soon imitated by Paul on the piano. As the piece developed, the interplay between the piano and violin created a dramatic crescendo with both instruments competing for centre stage while carefully preserving the musical themes so expertly crafted by Beethoven.

This was a piece which demanded incredible coordination between the piano and violin, and the teamwork demonstrated by both performers was remarkable. As they played, they exchanged small nods and seem to have mastered the art of communicating with the most minimal effort. The audience were taken perfectly through the full range of emotions the piece has to offer, in what was arguably the climax of the concert.

Nobody was ready for the performance to end there and the audience were lucky to be treated to an encore with Damien

offering a prize for any member who could identify the piece – a challenge beyond the talents of this article's writer. What occurred on that evening in the Chapel was pure magic. The performers' mastery of their instruments could not be overstated, and it is Gray's Inn's great fortune that Paul and Damien decided not to concentrate exclusively on musical careers.

*Joel Semakula*

## VIOLIN AND PIANO

On 13 June, members and guests of Gray's Inn were treated to a wonderful evening of musical talent, when Louisa Staples played the violin accompanied by Svitlana Kosenko on the piano. Both musicians were superb, and it was evident by the end of the performance that the entire Chapel was palpably moved.

Louisa was aged only 17 and studying for her AS Level examinations, which made her devotion to the violin and her achievements even more impressive. She began playing aged five and in 2008 was awarded a place at the prestigious Yehudi Menuhin School, performing in festivals and recitals across the world. In 2016, she was a string finalist in the BBC Young Musician of the Year and a semi-finalist in the senior division of the Menuhin Competition. Svitlana was born in Ukraine and studied at Kharkov University. Her numerous awards include first prize in the Smetana International Competition in 2001 and Best Pianist at the Joseph Suder Lieder Competition in 2012. Currently, she is an Accompanist in Residence at the Yehudi Menuhin School, where she has been since September 2014.

The first piece was 'Chaconne' from Partita II in D minor BWV1004 by J S Bach. This was an intense, almost haunting, piece. As the clear, crisp sounds of the violin echoed in the Chapel the audience were instantly captured by Louisa's passionate and mature playing.

Next, Rondo from Concerto V in A major K219 by W A Mozart was performed by the violin and the piano. Light and chirpy, it encouraged the violin and the piano to flirt with one another, as both musicians became absorbed by the music.

'Fratres' by Arvo Pärt was the third work performed. This was a powerful piece of music. The violin slowly climbed down

from a high pitch to be answered by the piano's deep notes, the dark and sombre mood being reflected in the expressions of the performers. The stark difference in pitches was very severe and effective. Personally, this was my favourite: the contrast was utterly engaging.

The penultimate piece was Allegro from Concerto II BB117 by Béla Bartók, which was busy with a very fast tempo, as the title suggests. The music had a dance-like composition, which was quite captivating. The performance concluded with Ballad from Sonata III Op 27 by Eugène Ysaÿe, played only on the violin, which truly showcased the range of Louisa's talent: inspiring, dazzling and alarming, all at once.

The audience was treated to an encore – a piece by Bartók – before retiring to the Large Pension Room for supper. It was a delightfully varied programme full of drama and emotion, and played exquisitely by Louisa and Svitlana.

*Elin Hughes*

### KEVIN LOH, GUITAR

For the third of the Concerts, on 20 June, we were treated to a performance by a prodigy, when Kevin Loh played with extraordinary mastery and soul, far beyond his 19 years.

Born and raised in Singapore, Kevin was talent-scouted at the intimidatingly impressive age of 12. He was awarded a grant by the Rolling Stones to study at the prestigious Yehudi Menuhin School and, since graduating, has garnered an overwhelming number of international awards and accolades.

The concert opened with a performance of J S Bach's Lute Suite No 1 in E Minor, BWV 996. Bach's lute suites were most likely written for an instrument called the 'Lautenwerk', a now extinct cross between a lute and a harpsichord. However, the lute suites are commonly performed on guitar. Kevin gracefully moved from the prelude, a delicate fanfare, to the urgent sense of triumph of the later movements. The piece harboured both sobriety and joyfulness, artfully articulated by the spirited performance.

The second piece was the Sonata in F Major, Op 29 No 3 by Anton Diabelli. Diabelli was an Austrian composer and music publisher, who composed for both the guitar and the piano. He was a student of Haydn in Salzburg in the late 18th century. The Sonata has a complex and rich polyphonic texture that showcased Kevin Loh's technical proficiency, as he seamlessly resolved the fingering problems inherent in a few passages of the piece.

The audience then enjoyed three songs by Franz Schubert, arranged for the guitar by J K Mertz. The first, 'Aufenthalt' (from Schwanengesang, D 957, No 5), was broodingly smooth; the second, 'Standchen' (from Schwanengesang, D 957, No 4), gathered pace and intensity, while the third, 'Die Post' (from Winterreise, D 957, No 13), was a majestic song that crescendoed cyclically to its captivating conclusion. Mertz's arrangements were deftly performed, with powerful directness and immediacy.

The climax of the evening was a virtuosic performance of Joaquin Rodrigo's 'Invocacion y Danza'. The darker piece began with dissonant harmonics beset with a lingering hazy bass line. The music then became increasingly brisk and animated, moving into a dreamy waltz that retained its

earlier sense of tension. The dramatic final movements of the music were dazzlingly powerful.

Kevin Loh treated us to a memorable and impressively accomplished performance. We were privileged to have him perform at Gray's Inn.

*Gethin Thomas*

### ROGER SAYER, ORGAN

The Summer Concerts came to a close on 27 June with a recital by Roger Sayer, Organist and Director of Music at Temple Church – introduced as a 'friend from down the hill' coming to play at Gray's Inn 'in a sense of amity'.

Roger explained his programme for the evening – six organ pieces spanning from the 17th to 20th century, including works by J S Bach, William Lloyd Webber, Felix Mendelssohn, Jehan Alain, Marco lo Musico and Maurice Duruflé – and described it as 'rather risky'. In between the different, albeit sometimes connected, pieces Roger guided the audience with insightful explanations.

To start, Roger played what he referred to as an 'epic' piece by J S Bach, namely 'Prelude and Fugue in C minor BWV 546', and warned: 'Brace yourselves.' The piece did indeed prove to be dramatic, particularly the ending.

Next came 'Five Portraits for Home Organ' by William Lloyd Weber (1941–82) which, as its name suggests, consisted of five smaller pieces intended as musical 'portraits'. The first three were dedicated to ladies, the third to his favourite student, Justine. Probably in line with the characters of the ladies, the pieces differed in pace, tone and rhythm. While the first was very soft and slow with a tender start and some high notes, the second was rather jolly, and the third almost a dance tune. The fourth portrait was much slower in contrast to the fifth, which was short, fast-paced and featured another fun tune. This last one was said to be the composer's favourite – and was in fact dedicated to his cats! Turning to the third piece, Sonta Op 65 No 6 by Felix Mendelssohn, Roger explained the intricate variations for the organist in playing this piece, sometimes in the right or left hand or pedals and in D-minor.

The fourth, fifth and sixth works Roger had selected were connected and, in the order in which they were played, were 'Litanies' by Jehan Alain (1911–40), 'New Litanies' by Marco lo Musico (b. 1971) and 'Prélude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain' by Maurice Duruflé (1902–86), the latter two being inspired by Jehan Alain piece. Marco lo Musico, Roger explained, was famous for writing litanies in reverse and based on rock music. In line with this unusual inspiration, it certainly stood out and contrasted with Duruflé's prelude, which was a pleasant tribute to Jehan Alain, who was killed in the Second World War.

So, for the fourth and final Summer Concert the Chapel audience enjoyed a colourful and impressive performance which at times had them holding their breath and at other times tapping their feet. We are most grateful to Mr Sayer and hope to welcome 'our friend from down the hill' to Gray's Inn Chapel again soon.

*Miriam Boxberg*