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Night music

Roger Woodward
Kensington Town Hall

This was inspired programming for a late evening of musical contemplation, and indeed inspired playing. Roger Woodward began with the Barraqué sonata, a work which he goes on revealing as huge and uncomfortable, beginning with such a gathering of creative and re-creative energy, then running aground on episodes of note repetition that become almost unbearable precisely because the expressive effect is not forced but left simply inevitable. He comes at last to the long stretch of negation that is what the piece is about, though of course the broken gestures, the thinned textures and the silences here gain their meaning from the contrast with the abundance that has gone before.

This was a long performance, lasting a little over 50 minutes, but conveyed throughout with intense concentration, total confidence in every move, and a strong feeling for the drama of Barraqué, for the desperation in a sudden high motif coming in the middle of baritone rumination, or for the crushing malignancy of the lowest register. Fifteen years after the composer's death it remains regrettable that he was unable to fulfil his plan to write another sonata for Woodward, even though a second Barraqué sonata is among the most unimaginable of might-have-beens.

Two Stockhausen piano pieces, Nos. 9 and 11, provided a striking contrast, for where the Barraqué has immense singleness of purpose and strength of movement through all its discontinuities, Stockhausen, like Messiaen, finds no problem in being disjointed and static. These were big, empowered and scintillating performances, but there was a sense, even with a will like Woodward's at work, of whistling in the dark. Nor have I ever heard it made so clear that the composer of *Licht* was already there, harmonically, in his music of the 1950s.

Paul Griffiths

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Following that up with a second, late night Prom at Kensington Town Hall where the pianist Roger Woodward played Barraqué's piano sonata and some Stockhausen made a dramatic contrast, although the Barraqué and the Walton are exactly contemporary, finished in the early 1950s.

The sonata, all 50 minutes of it, has a monumental place in modern piano literature, held more by reputation than direct experience because it has few exponents. Woodward is outstanding among them; and his performance, uncompromisingly grand in the turbulent density of detail that fills the first half of the piece, was nothing less than awesome, its tensions sustained right through to the more open textures of the second half.

Woodward's Stockhausen *Piano Pieces*, the teasing No. IX and the aleatory No. XI were, more moderate (and more truly pianistic) statements which found Woodward making appropriate adjustments of style: a salutary reminder that the keyboard music of the 1950s avant garde, for all its family relationship, does throw up individual voices that require an individual response.

Michael John White

THE INDEPENDENT

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