

Woodward conveys radical traits of the piano masters

THE wonder is that Roger Woodward has waited so long before making Debussy a major item in his interpretative dialogue with audiences in Sydney. As soon as he began the French master's second book of Preludes, which amounted to almost the whole of the second part of his recital, it seemed obvious that this was a composer whose texture and manner suited Woodward superlatively well.

Debussy asks for treble sonorities as light as a high and distant bell and, on the other hand, for sudden accents as sharp and forceful as a viciously tweaked guitar string. Woodward relishes such contrasts, indeed constructs a recital out of implementing them both as long-term structure and as intimately judged detail.

Debussy dissolves pianistic impacts in the softly revolving patterns of his *Brouillards* (*Mists*), the first of the Preludes, and Woodward loves nothing better than to turn arpeggiations and similar figurations into the equivalent of a gently spreading ripple. Equally, the pianist is fearfully at home in making effervescent brightness and a triumphantly skidding glissando appear side by side, as required in *Fireworks* (*Feux d'artifice*), the 12th piece of the set, or in impersonating the vaudevillian cakewalk of an American clown in the prelude entitled *General Lavine - excentric* (excentric is Debussy's spelling).

Debussy loved English and Scottish references. The vista of the sea at Eastbourne, of all unlikely places, helped inspire his great orchestral poem, *La Mer*. His *Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq.* makes quite subtle fun out of an

MUSIC

ROGER WOODWARD (piano)
Music: Schubert, Mozart, Debussy
ABC/SSO subscription recital
Sydney Town Hall, September 28

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initially broad statement of *God Save The Queen*. The homage is playful but sincere. Among all authors, as Georges Jean-Aubry recalled, Dickens was Debussy's best and oldest imaginative companion. Woodward's playing of this prelude possessed wit as well as comedy.

It was predictable that the soloist would be particularly at home with the Spanish references of *La Puerta del Vino*, with its opportunities for quasi-Andalusian eruptiveness of texture. *Prelude No 11*, with its dazzling alternation of thirds, was a sustained example of technical brilliance without showmanship; *Bruyeres* (*Heather*) a Scottish hillside in the gentlest of sunlight.

Woodward ended his recital with the highly developed pictorialism and kinaesthetic mimicry of Debussy's *L'Isle joyeuse*, Watteauesque hedonism interpreted with a matching grace and control by both composer and pianist.

Woodward's manner of reaching his all-Debussyean second half was via the music of two thoroughly Austrian composers, Schubert and Mozart. Their Austrian-ness expressed itself in the warming influence of Italianate melody, long a borrowed inheritance in Vienna. It was typically daring of Woodward to begin with two Schubert movements in Adagio tempo, D178 and D612, playing them as softly and ethereally as possible. Debussy was the eventual beneficiary of

the heightened awareness that Woodward's quietness generated. Schubert's C minor *Allergretto*, D915, brought action and development out of spellbound reverie. The piano piece (*Klavierstück*) in E flat minor, D946 No 1, reached the intensity of forte more than once before a tiny *Album Leaf* (*Albumblatt*) in G suggested a kinship between Schubert in this mood and the love of tiny alpine flowers felt by a later Austrian composer, Anton Webern.

Woodward's choice of Mozart, a composer he has been coming to terms with much more thoroughly in his recent performances with chamber ensembles, did not run to one of the sonatas with a slow movement aching through a series of delayed resolutions. He played the K570 B flat sonata, its spacious thematic opening, contrasted with chromatic giggling that Woodward turned into a kind of sotto voce dialogue. As the finale is the sort of vigorous, cheerful piece with which Mozart liked to end a piano concerto, it allowed the first half of the recital an interlude of total extroversion before the D minor *Fantasia*, K397, offered him a perfect vehicle for striking shifts from loud to soft, from slow to sprightly.

Schubert, Mozart and Debussy. Nothing could be more conventional in prospect as the material of a piano recital. It was wholly characteristic of Woodward that the choice, order and strategy of contrasts in his performance managed to suggest - healthily, I suggest - that each composer can still be heard as a radical and that a pianist of a very special kind can persuade us that we are hearing them as if for the first time.

Destiny Deacon's

Photograph by SAHLAN HAYES.

emits poignant parallels with everyday life. One contains a ad-embroidered epitaph to a giant atop a photograph of two man skulls. In another, a doll's stic pink leg is delicately splayed in muslin, and in one a stened lizard intrigues rather in irks with its splattered scale sterner.

The work of these three photographed artists could not be more terse, yet they have in common enchant for stagginess, using the dium to convey a holistic areness of the world that goes beyond sensitive observation.

WHAT'S ON CRITICS' CHOICE

Australian Contemporary Art
t, Royal Exhibition Buildings,
bourn, all weekend.

Vicente Butron, installation, D,
62 Erskine Street, Sydney,
ll tomorrow.

Sophie Blackall, paintings,
tford Gallery, 220 Liverpool
st, East Sydney, until October 8.
ohn Cullinane, paintings,
tess Gallery, 38 Boronia Street,
fern, until 16 October.

Dr Omah Elmouieh, paint-
t, Art Gallery of NSW,
October.

Indian beat goes down a treat

SYDNEY people are obviously hungry for Indian classical dance and music, judging by the overflowing audience on opening night and the extra performance announced beforehand - even taking into account the small size of the venue and the brevity of the season, now extended to Sunday.

So the Odissi Dance Company and sarod player Ashok Roy, who share the bill for this Sydney Asian Theatre Festival event, are

DANCE

ODISSI DANCE COMPANY ASHOK ROY

Sydney Asian Theatre Festival
Belvoir Street Theatre, September
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JILL SYKES

vocalists Usha Pillai and Susi Peters, and the group's versatile artistic director, Nirmal Jena, on percussion, harmonium and vocals.

ably precise in her account of the steps, and so energetically animated with facial expressions, as well as body language - appears to be dancing in a cultural vacuum. Rebecca Coote, long-limbed and physically flexible, flings her body in the appropriate directions without sufficient control and fails to invest her actions with any apparent meaning or understanding. Similarly, the well-drilled dancing of Avril Jeans and