

13/6/03.

REVIEW

Performance:

Roger Woodward Medici piano recital

Venue:

Conservatorium Theatre, South Bank, June 13 2003

Reviewer:

Patricia Kelly

IT IS easy to take a piano recital for granted until a pianist such as Australia's Roger Woodward comes along and reveals anew the pianist's skill and the ingenious instrument on which two hands can produce the range of a symphony orchestra.

Woodward was the last of four pianists in the 2003 Medici season, a series which for 10 years has brought to Brisbane some of the world's finest pianists, all different in style, repertoire, technique, temperament – all fascinating, all at the peak of human excellence.

Among the many, Woodward's recital at Queensland Conservatorium Theatre was special, not just because he is Australian and was making his Medici debut, but because in some strange way his performance brought together a reverence for the past, an understanding of the present and a sense of a timeless musical tomorrow. He dedicated it to the late conductor, Georg Tintner, who made wonderful music in Queensland for many years.

Woodward reined in his weighty technique to shape the contained images of Debussy's *Estampes* and *Preludes* book 2. He expanded the style for three Chopin pieces, then tossed off encores, including an individually defined *Prelude and Fugue*.

The impressionist harmonies and sonorities of Debussy's cycles were enhanced by the scintillating Steinway resonance in Woodward's performance, each vignette clearly cast, the delicate, the witty, the rhapsodic. Joyous as was his *Gardens under Rain*, a memory lingers still of Irina Plotnikova's fingers rippling through this music with a brilliance unmatched by any other pianist since her Brisbane City Hall recital two years after winning the 1977 Sydney International Piano Competition.

Woodward's Chopin work was majestic and thoughtful, none more so than the *Polonaise-fantasia*, replete with incredible tremolo work, a ferocious energy that throbbled with yearning, as if the loss of musical friends was an unbearable sorrow. It was Chopin's last major work and in Woodward's hands became a worthy memorial to Tintner.