

# Woodward's fine tribute to master

Roger Woodward Piano  
Recital, Friday August 30,  
City Hall. Reviewed by  
DOMINIC BRITAIN.

THE music industry seems to love anniversaries. Mozart is a good example. 1956 and 1991, the bicentenaries of his birth and death, have seen the composer and his work ruthlessly rammed down the public's throat at concerts, in broadcasts and in a maelstrom of recordings and books.

It is called slightly less bearable by a curious selectivity which seems to plague the process. This year is the centenary of Prokofiev's birth, and the event is passing with scarcely a murmur. Yet Prokofiev, not Mozart, needs the exposure. He suffers under an unjust public perception of him as either a musical comic, as in the opera *The Love of Three Oranges*, or as a heavy-on-the-car modernist as, for example, in his *Scythian Suite*.

Pianist Roger Woodward, then, comes as something of a relief. Not only has he presented an all-Prokofiev concert, but he chose a programme which neatly illustrated the several facets of the composer's style.

He opened with the *Seventh Piano Sonata*. It is good music - Prokofiev's often fruitless search for a new simplicity was at last being rewarded. The sonata has a clearer structure, and more coherent textures, than his work of the previous two decades.

The *Op 22 Visions Fugitives* consists of 20 small pieces which almost comprise a manual of Prokofiev's views on modern music.

Woodward's playing was superb. Approaching the work with the single-minded absorption of a high priest, he captured the lyrical flow in the *allegretto*, the humour in the *ridiculosamente* and the hard, percussive mood of the *feroce* with ease. But the *Visions* were never intended to be played together in one long sitting, and they became bewildering in their relentless procession. It was a constant effort to prevent the mind grappling for a connection between the pieces.

The mood was lightened by a march from *The Love of Three Oranges* before a breathtaking rendition of the infamous *Op 4 No 4 Suggestion Diabolique*.

Woodward rose to the challenge with relish, sailing through the intricate fingering and rapid changes of direction yet still preserving clarity and an underlying sense of nervous intensity.

Outstanding performances such as this underline the painful reflection that this is probably the last Prokofiev concert-goers are to be allowed to hear this year.

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