

R. WOODWARD

Woodward displays his mastery

RECITAL

Roger Woodward (piano)

Conservatorium Auditorium

Review: Neville Cohn

AT ANY one time there's seldom more than a handful of pianists worldwide who can launch into a recital of Debussy's Etudes and emerge a half hour or so later with reputation intact.

On Friday, Australian musician extraordinaire Roger Woodward went one better, coming through with banners flying. The skills needed to master the physical complexities of these dozen pieces are legion, and vouchsafed to few. It is only the most courageous and gifted of pianists who could realistically contemplate negotiating this formidable obstacle course in its entirety in public.

Impeccable memory, a fiercely intelligent musical mind, and fingers which know few fears, more often than not combined to dazzling effect. Time and again here, Woodward demonstrated his formidable capacity to reveal the phantoms, in turn angelic and demonic, which lurk behind the printed note.

Consider the Etude of the Octaves; this stylised waltz came across faultlessly in a blaze of glorious piano sound. Much the same could be said of the Etude of the Chords in which Woodward, in a display of keyboard daring, powered through with an élan and accuracy that swept all before it.

And whether in the Etude of the Reiterated Notes, a devilishly difficult toccata, or the Etude of the Chromatics, in which webs of shimmering tone were coaxed from the instrument, Woodward adapted chameleon-like to each of the composer's subtle requirements.

On the basis of this performance, it is hardly surprising to learn that Woodward is recording the complete keyboard works of Debussy for the ABC Classics label.

What a shame that the printed program was devoid of an explanatory program note on the Etudes for the benefit of those members of the audience who might have been unfamiliar with these