

# Two masters interpret Prokofiev for Spring

## SPRING FESTIVAL

Goossens Hall, September 9  
Reviewed by **PETER McCALLUM**

Prokofiev's great genius was his light hand with irony — not as bitter as Shostakovich, nor as frivolous as Poulenc, nor as intelligent as Stravinsky — yet with a devastating brilliance of style which none of these quite matched.

Last Thursday's Sydney Spring recital captured the Janus-face of this talent in his two violin sonatas, the first

hauntingly disturbed and oblique, the second ebulliently big but still with a deadening hollowness to the echo of its strong gestures.

I preferred the first for its moon white incandescence in the first movement, its numbingly machine-like violence in the second movement, its third-movement colour and its disturbing quiet Coda in the finale.

Yet the second perhaps had the finer performance with Woodward and Wilkomirska conjuring quietly sweet

sentiment from the first and beautiful third movements and tightening the last in a vicelike grip of mechanical jollity.

This was an evening in which two master performers reached across the generations, Woodward distilling some of his finest thoughts in understatement, and Wilkomirska, the pert and fiery elder sage, a lifetime of interpretative perception sublimated into her still-fearsome bow. I recall first hearing Wilkomirski in 1969, playing Szymanowski in the Town Hall and the image which remains in my mind is of fiery rhapsodic intensity.

Thirty years later, fate has blown her back to Sydney where she now lives (I should declare here that she now also teaches at the Conservatorium, where I also have a day job). Today it is her unerring instinct for structure and characterisation which is most telling — the sudden obsessive pizzicatos, and the feeling for shape and direction which can span a whole phrase or a whole movement. There were pitch problems at times, but it is a rare privilege to be able to follow a great artist's development over such a long timespan.

Woodward was at his whimsical best in the *Five Sarcastms, opus 17* for piano just before the second sonata. This was a performance where complete control of texture, sound and sudden contrast allowed the irony to blossom with style and detachment and where even the bow was sarcastic.



**Roger Woodward . . . whimsical best.** Photograph by SAHLAN HAYES