

roger woodward

Fine balance in Chopin tribute

ROGER Woodward embarked last Monday on a long musical voyage: nothing less than the performance of the entire piano works of Chopin in 12 recitals.

The first four recitals take place this week; the completion of the cycle stretches into 1985.

No musician would undertake such a task lightly, and there was nothing in these deeply considered, unflinching performances to suggest that Woodward takes it in the least degree lightly.

Woodward, trained in the composer's Polish homeland, is a Chopin interpreter of the highest order: combining intimate knowledge of the style, a fine balance of intellect and emotion, and an astonishing technique. The opportunity to hear these qualities applied to the full extent of Chopin's output is a rare privilege.

It was characteristic of Woodward's approach that he chose a selection of 12 mazurkas - those underrated miniatures that are too often relegated to mere encore-fodder - as the centrepiece of the program.

The mazurkas are in some ways the most fascinating and original of all Chopin's works. He used them for many of his most daring experiments in harmony, tonality and design.

Woodward's grouping of these 12 pieces, which took no account of their chronological order, was in itself a subtle and successful exercise in composition. He made of it a sort of song-cycle without words, having an emotional rise and fall over and above the sense and feeling of the individual mazurkas.

By placing together two mazurkas in C sharp minor

Music

Roger Woodward, Pianist
Town Hall, Sydney

MARTIN LONG

(Opus 63 No. 3 and the unusually long Opus 50 No. 3) and strictly observing Chopin's moderate tempo indications, he even provided a "slow movement", a poignant and reflective interlude among these generally lively dances.

(Woodward's program building is clearly a matter of careful thought, and even afterthought; he made an unannounced switch in the order of the bracket of waltzes opening the recital).

It need hardly be said that Woodward is as much at home in the big works as in these little ones, and as sympathetic to the fine filigree of the nocturnes as to the thunder of the polonaises.

In ending the recital with a pair of crowd-pleasers, the Polonaise in F Sharp Minor and the even more familiar Polonaise in A Flat, he showed how much more there is to these well-planned musical dramas than superficial virtuosity. They were excitingly fresh interpretations.

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R. Douglas Sheldon,
Columbia Artists Management Inc.
165 W57th Street, New York
N.Y. 10019 U.S.A.
Tel: (212) 397 6900

Norman Lawrence Artist Management

35 Britannia Row
London N1 8QN
Tel: (01) 226 3377 (01) 359 0579
Telex: 268279 Britno G