

Richard Farrell

RICHARD Farrell (1926-1958), one of the most gifted pianists of his generation, had scarcely begun his international career when it was tragically cut short in his thirty-second year by a car accident near Arundel in Sussex. It is fortunate that he left a number of recordings: they show his brilliance, authority and élan, in works that include some of the most popular in the Romantic repertoire, among them the Liszt concerto presented here.

Farrell's prodigious technical abilities revealed themselves from an early age. He astonished audiences in his hometown of Wellington, New Zealand, and at the age of seven went to Sydney to study under Alexander Sverjensky, a leading piano teacher at the newly founded Alfred Hill Academy of Music. The usually hard-boiled Sydney press hailed him as a celebrity. Encouraged by the visiting American pianist William Kapell, he became in 1947 a student of Olga Samaroffs at the Juilliard School in New York; there he first encountered the music of leading contemporary American composers, some of which he took into his repertoire. It was in 1947 that I first heard him play, when he made a return visit to New Zealand. In the old music room of Victoria University College in Wellington he gave a performance of Copland's Piano Sonata (1941) that remains memorable to this day for its compelling sense of drama and power and for the way it opened up new musical horizons. Then only 20, he nevertheless played in a distinguished manner that impressed all who heard him. Subsequent concerts of music by Brahms, Liszt, Schumann and others – he tended to devote himself to the Romantic repertoire – bore out this first impression.

Farrell's Carnegie Hall début in 1948 won exceptional notices, and when he settled in London he was once more acclaimed by the critics. His contemporaries were well aware of his stature, as was the New Zealand composer Edwin Carr, then studying with Benjamin Frankel at the Guildhall School of Music: 'He was a technical wizard, an absolute natural. His pedalling was immaculate, he played with great clarity and his gestures were never exaggerated. He was a fantastic sight-reader and had a wonderful ear. He was one of those rare geniuses like Solomon.' The New Zealand-born conductor Warwick Braithwaite was a frequent collaborator and described how 'At times during performances his artistic temperament would take charge and quite suddenly the whole concerto would be suffused with a glow of intense musical depth and understanding.' The last time Richard Farrell played under Braithwaite's direction was during the Royal Tour of New Zealand in 1953, when he gave 'a most brilliant and exhilarating performance of Liszt's E flat Concerto'. Farrell was also noted for his charm of manner and acute sense of humour: his loss was deeply felt by the whole world of music. 'His records', wrote his producer at Pye, Douglas Terry, 'will bear witness to a marvellous talent.'

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Grieg:

Piano Concerto in A minor Op. 16
Lyric Pieces (excerpts) Op 12~71
Arietta Op.12 No.1
Butterfly Op.43 No.1
In My Native Country Op. 43 No.3
Valse-Impromptu Op.47 No.1
Melodie Op.47 No.3
Niels W. Gade Op.57 No 2
Wedding day at Troldhaugen Op.65 No.6
Remembrances Op.71 No.7

Liszt:

Piano Concerto in E flat No. 1
Richard Farrell (piano) – Halle' Orchestra (George Weldon)

Venues:

Walthamstow Assembly Hall, 1958
Free Trade Hall, Manchester, 23/24th August 1956

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