

Piano recital a delight

WHAT: Chamber Music New Zealand:
Piers Lane (piano). Waltzes Op 39
(Brahms); Carnival (Schumann);
Nocturnes Op 27 (Chopin); Variations on
a Theme of Chopin (Rakhmaninov)
WHERE: Wellington Town Hall, Tuesday
REVIEWED BY: Linds Taylor

ONE might have been a bit sorry that Piers Lane's programme didn't contain a more substantial work, but by the end of a thoroughly delightful evening, I wondered just what more I could have asked for.

In lesser hands, Brahms' set of individually slight 16 waltzes can seem just that. But Lane gave each one such an individual stamp, his piano ringing like a fairground instrument in some, whimsical, charming or elegant in others, so the sequence was much more than the sum of its parts.

It always surprises me to find people who don't know Schumann's *Carnaval*. I discovered it about the age of 20, with astonishment and disbelief that such a composition, so packed with thrilling melodic and pianistic variety, imagination and colour, could exist, and I wore out LPs and struggled with it endlessly at the piano. In the half century since, it's still in my desert island collection.

I've heard performances I didn't like much, but Lane's I loved; he approached it with a marvellous playfulness, all the virtuosity needed, a touch of rubato here and there, and an ear acutely tuned to Schumann's sense of the theatre. I enjoyed the way he piled phrase on phrase, hardly leaving time for one to end before plunging into the next.

With Chopin's two Nocturnes of Op 27, two of the most gorgeous of the 19, Lane found a quite different character in the piano. They could hardly be more different in mood; the nocturnal sadness of the first dissipated entirely with the very opening notes of the second, airy, insouciant.

The Chopin *Variations (on Prelude No 20, in C minor)* is one of Rakhmaninov's less-known works (it gets no mention in the *New Grove Dictionary*, for example); perhaps its parts are somewhat disparate, but it's a fit companion to other music of the time such as the second suite for two pianos, the cello sonata, the second piano concerto.

Lane's love for it was clear and I'm sure that his revealing of its great beauties will have added another major work by this composer to many people's shopping list.