

Review



Peter Jablonski Piano

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By Tim Ashley , 1 Feb 2012

Recital at the Queen Elisabeth Hall in London 31 Jan 12

We don't hear as much of Swedish-born pianist Peter Jablonski in the UK as we might, which is strange, given that he lives here. He developed a reputation for being a hard-hitting heavyweight, a criticism not borne out by his recent work, in which vigour is offset by great delicacy. There's a maverick quality to Jablonski's programming, however, that reveals an easy familiarity with a repertoire of considerable breadth. His latest QEH recital was no exception.

The first half consisted of two big, moody 19th-century ballades: Liszt's Second in B minor and Grieg's in G minor. Some pianists prefer a bright tone in Liszt, but Jablonski opted for something darker, so that the obsessive left-hand chromatic scales heaved with menace, while the arpeggios and figurations that surround the expansive central melody combined beauty with a deep sense of unease. Grieg's Ballade – in reality a set of variations on a Norwegian folksong – has a discursive quality that Jablonski could not disguise, though the emotional range of the performance was immense, with crushing grief in the central *lento*, and sardonic, angry humour in the *scherzando* passages.

After the interval came works by Gershwin, Copland and Samuel Barber. The jazzy extroversion with which he tackled Gershwin's Three Preludes for Piano spoke volumes about his fondness for this music, while Earl Wild's transcription of Embraceable You was breathtaking in its dexterity and finesse. Muted and Sensuous, the fourth of Copland's Four Piano Blues, was a wonderful mix of sleaze and elegance. The case for Barber's Sonata – with its angular lines and sparse sonorities – could not, meanwhile, have been better put. There was one encore – Debussy's *Feux d'artifice*, sensationally played.

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