

Pianist & Coach

In Conversation with Clarinettist Janet Hilton

Posted on October 29, 2013



Recently British clarinettist Janet Hilton visited Leeds College of Music to give masterclasses to clarinet students. What struck me most during each session she taught was her utter commitment to every student and her ability to choose her words so carefully that every bit of feedback was encouraging as well as hitting the nail perfectly on the head. She has a fantastic energy, which enthused the participants as well as the audience.

Janet will return to Leeds College of Music very soon to perform at the André Tchaikowsky Symposium on 1 November. She will perform twice during the evening's programme: first to perform the André Tchaikowsky clarinet sonata with pianist Jakob Fichert and then later in the programme to perform the *Arioso e Fuga* for solo clarinet. I

was particularly excited to learn that she has performed the Sonata with André Tchaikowsky and therefore I thought it would be excellent to hear a few of her thoughts on the works she is to perform as well as the revival of André Tchaikowsky's work.

Nico de Villiers: How did you know André Tchaikowsky and how did it happen that you ended up working together? Anything specific that you can remember of him?

Janet Hilton: During the 1970s I was playing with the Lindsay Quartet and with pianist Peter Frankl. They were good friends of André and I met him before a rehearsal with the Lindsays. (We shared the back of a taxi and got along well, he was very flirtatious and amusing). I played the Sonata with Peter Frankl, and then got the chance to play it with André, I think both performances were recorded for the BBC.

NdV: How do you find Sonata as well as the Arioso e Fuga? Are they well-written for the

clarinet?

JH: Both pieces are fine writing for the clarinet and musically very strong. I had not played the Solo until now, its quite a challenge to the technique and stamina.

NdV: You have performed the sonata with André before. Is this piece a part of your regular repertoire or is this the first time that you play it again since you performed it with André?

JH: Although I played the Sonata a few times, it was not part of my regular repertoire, this was only because the straight clarinet and piano recital was always a more occasional treat. Promoters tend to want the classics of the repertoire or first performances.

NdV: How do you find revisiting these piece for an occasion dedicated specifically to the composer?

JH: I feel honoured to take part in this revival of his music, the more I have worked on the pieces, the more I have enjoyed them.

The solo piece [*Arioso e Fuga*] was difficult to prepare, the copy of the manuscript was hard to read. I think that if it had been published in the clear format of the Sonata it would have had many performances. It would be great if a new edition could now be published. Its a real show piece, the Arioso is wonderfully lyrical, and in the Fuga, virtuoso playing is needed, just the thing to appeal to young players.

NdV: What impact do these pieces have on you? What are the emotions that André's works conjure up for you?

JH: The music is distinguished, it makes me feel that I would have liked to know him better and I wish that I had listened to his other works at the time.

NdV: Anything else that you want to tell?

JH: I remember his quirky humour and his original and brilliant personality and intellect.

Janet Hilton first came to public notice in her student days in Manchester, when she played the Mozart Clarinet Concerto with the BBC Northern Orchestra and won a national competition, which brought her many engagements. She went on to build a distinguished career as a soloist, playing at most of Britain's major festival. Throughout her career she was associated with the Lindsay String Quartet until they retired in 2005. Internationally she has played in most European countries, Canada and the United States.

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