

Friday, 13 May, 2011

Adrienne Pieczonka Sings Luminous Koerner Hall Recital

by Joseph K. So



Soprano Adrienne Pieczonka (photo: Johannes Ifkovits)

Adrienne Pieczonka Recital

Brian Zeger, piano

Koerner Hall, Royal Conservatory of Music, Toronto

Saturday May 7m 2011 at 8 pm

"Adrienne - you *are* the music!" a voice shouted from the auditorium when soprano Adrienne Pieczonka had just sung the first of her encores, Schubert's *An die Musik*, and getting ready to launch into the second, "Somewhere" from *West Side Story*. The audience's initial shock at this little breach of concert etiquette turned into a burst of delighted applause. In fact, it was an evening full of accolades from a nearly sold out house, where the audience showed their appreciation to an artist who, in the mind of many, is the reigning Canadian prima donna. The soprano combines a beautiful voice with a sincerity and simplicity that touches the heart - an artist without artifice. On this particular evening, the extremely receptive audience was made up of voice fans of course, but also friends and family of the singer, gathered there to honour and enjoy an evening of music-making. It was an old-fashioned "love-in."

The soprano began with a group of well known Schubert lieder. There was no evidence of the cold that knocked her out of the opening night of the COC *Ariadne auf Naxos* a week earlier. The voice was clear and strong, the tone pure, with its trademark gleam. Her interpretation was straightforward, rather generalized in its emotional expression, the text communicated with unpretentious directness. Some may have found her interpretation a little bland or subdued - perhaps, but to my ears it was a refreshing change from the rather convoluted or overly intellectual sort of "word-pointing" *a la Schwarzkopf* that one sometimes encounters in recitals by "lieder specialists." The two Strauss groups showed off her silvery timbre and warm, sweet tone, and in particular her ability to caress a phrase with *mezza voce*. There was a poise in her delivery of these songs, particularly pieces like "Traum durch die Dämmerung" or "Das Rosenband." A highlight of the evening was the *Wesendonck-Lieder*, a cycle she must have sung dozens of times. Written very much in the middle register, it's relatively low tessitura sometimes poses a problem for lyric sopranos, but Pieczonka's full lyric voice with its warm and solid middle voice is ideally suited to these songs - "Im Treibhaus" and "Traume" were particularly lovely. The Wagner was followed by more Strauss, including "Morgen!" which the soprano delivered with admirable repose. The singer made an emotional dedication of the final song "Zueignung" to her wife mezzo Laura Tucker. It was sung with unbridled joy and full-throttle ecstasy. Throughout the recital, Met pianist Brian Zeger offered the most attentive and sympathetic support, the two benefiting from having performed the identical program last summer at Kent Nagano's Orford Festival in Quebec. Let's hope this is the first of many collaborations between the two artists. Four encores followed, and the audience went home happy.

Schubert: Ganymed
Das Rosenband
Die Forelle
Du liebst mich nicht
Verklärung
Gretchen am Spinnrade
Strauss: Traum durch die Dämmerung
Das Rosenband
Die Nacht
Ruhe meine Seele
Mein Auge
Wie sollten wir geheim sie halten
Wagner: Wesendonck Lieder
Der Engel
Stehe still
Im Treibhaus
Schmerzen
Traume
Strauss: Du meines herzens Kronelein
Morgen!
Wir beide wollen springen
Zueignung