

## Wigmore Hall Concert September 12th 2008

It's a brave pianist who opens a recital with Gaspard de la nuit. Emmanuel Despax took on the challenge and gave a poised and lucid account of Ravel's demanding triptych inspired by Aloysius Bertrand's "gothic" poems centred on a water-nymph ('Ondine'), a doom-laden tolling bell (Le gibet) and a nightmarish goblin ('Scarbo').

Despax created a chaste and ethereal world in 'Ondine', a purity of utterance that was attractive... Despax's clarity was admirable, so too his finesse – he was en rapport with Ravel's aesthetic... 'Le gibet' was hypnotic in its timelessness and 'distance'... Despax finding a kinship here with Liszt. There was much to admire in Despax's lucid and musical account of Gaspard....

Maybe Children's Corner would have made a more suitable entrée...the in-between movements (played virtually attacca, to advantage) enjoyed an attractive innocence and avoidance of mannered cliché.

After an interval... Despax gave an 'epic' account of Schumann's Études symphoniques, close to the 40-minute mark and including the five 'Posthumous' variations. Despax now drew a richer palette of colours from the Fazioli piano...as the performance developed one became more aware of Despax's ability to communicate...and there was much that was affecting and stimulating in what had been a thoughtfully organised and integrated performance, one that had a long reach and true sense of culmination.

The first encore was soulful and spare ('The poet speaks', which ends Schumann's Kinderszenen) and the second, 'Mazeppa' (the fourth of Liszt's Transcendental Studies), was a further generous bonus and wrapped up the recital in heroic style.

Colin Anderson