



Wigmore Hall. The Soul of Music

writing of the Rachmaninov. Andrew signed off with an unannounced but stylish Schubert song (which was teasingly familiar but the name escaped me).

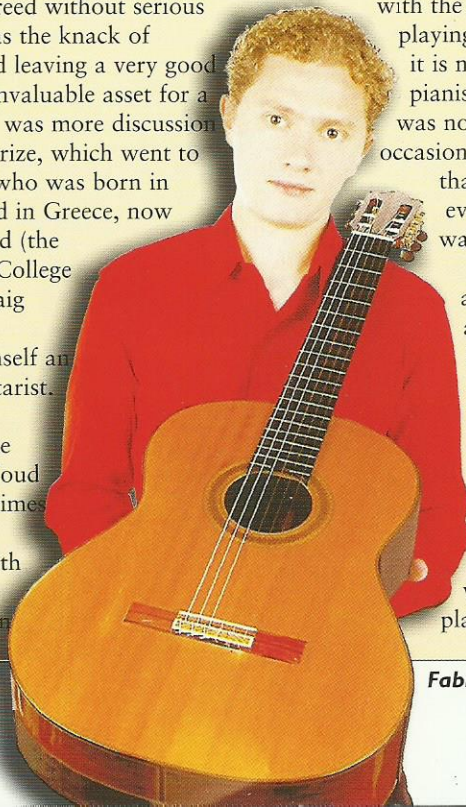
The solo pianist of the evening was Samantha Ward, who has received the Musicians' Company's Beethoven Medal and who has already appeared several times on TV and radio. She also provided

her own programme notes – an indication of the research she puts behind her interpretations. She opened with one of Scarlatti's popular harpsichord sonatas (Kk380), offering an unashamedly un-Baroque interpretation, luxuriating in the modern piano's sonorities and Scarlatti's famously pictorial ideas. She closed the first half of the concert with Schumann's

rarely performed *Romances*, presumed to reflect the devotion between Robert and his pianist-composer wife, Clara. These were rather less convincing, as Schumann's intimate, improvisatory style requires a degree of fantasy and poise that is very elusive – or perhaps is particularly difficult to capture in public performance? In the second half, Samantha returned to give a committed account of contemporary British composer Philip Martin's competition display piece *In a thousand valleys far and wide*, obviously relishing the work's self-conscious dynamic extremes and rhythmic virtuosity. Her final two performances were both outstanding in their different ways. The mercurial nature of Debussy's *Masques* was completely caught, with the fiendish repeated note passages dazzlingly done. Even more impressive was the closing performance of the evening – Liszt's titanic *Funeralles*, a moving but (being Liszt) barnstorming tribute to friends who fell in the 1849 uprisings. This appeared Samantha's strongest repertoire, as she generated thunderous volumes of sound along with dashing virtuosity, not least in the work's bravura left-hand octaves. An excellent choice as her closing piece, and superbly performed.

Freeman Ben Pateman

was generally agreed without serious argument. She has the knack of finishing well and leaving a very good impression - an invaluable asset for a performer. There was more discussion about the third prize, which went to Jon Gjylaci, 24, who was born in Albania, has lived in Greece, now studies in England (the Royal Northern College of Music and Craig Ogden) and who sensibly calls himself an international guitarist. He is competent, confident, and the owner of a very loud guitar that sometimes suggests that it accords better with his own temperament than



with the nature of the music he is playing. That is not to say that it is not capable of the subtlest pianissimo if required, but it was not in evidence on this occasion, leaving a slight feeling that we had not heard everything that the player was capable of.

A special prize was awarded to James Stewart, another student at the RSAMD; only 19, he is musically mature and has the ability to concentrate attention, not only his own but also that of the judges.

Even if, overall, the level did not quite reach that of the 2006 event, when no fewer than six players were in the running

for the top prizes, the high potential of each one of the competitors promises well for the future.

The 2007 competition was held on 29 November at the Coopers' Hall in the City of London. As in past years, the organisation was in the expert hands of Margaret Alford, the Company's Clerk. Pastmaster Adrian Davis attended as an auditor. Sponsors included The D'Addario Foundation for the Performing Arts, Ivor Mairants Musicentre, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Mel Bay Publishing Inc., Onboard Research, Manuel Rodriguez Guitars, Chanterelle Verlag, and Ediciones Joaquín Rodrigo. The panel of adjudicators comprised Assistant Michael Lewin (Chairman), with (in alphabetical order) Colin Cooper, Richard Hand, Eleftheria Kotzia, Junior Warden Maurice Summerfield and John Taylor.

Fabricio Mattos

