

## A visit to Bluthners

by Liveryman Heleen Mendl-Schrama

A sizeable number of Liverymen and Freemen foregathered at Bluthner Piano Centre on 12 February for an evening of light entertainment preceded by a reception with wine and delicious bites. There was an atmosphere of bonhomie and happy chatter until we were summoned to take our seats and after a word of welcome to the Master, Leslie East, and a brief introduction of the artists by the President of the Livery Club, Eugenie Maxwell, who is Consultant to Bluthner and who had organized and sponsored the event, the music commenced.

The singer Maya Sapone and the pianist Aleksander Szram presented songs and piano pieces which were most suitable to St. Valentine's Day – almost upon us. Mindful of the location of Bluthners', just off Berkeley Square, it seemed appropriate that they began with *A Nightingale sang in Berkeley Square*. After that Cole Porter's *Let's do it, let's fall in love* was given a spirited performance. Two George Gershwin songs followed: the well-known *Summertime* and the lovely *Someone to watch over me*. After Meredith Willson's (any relation of Roger?) *Till There was you*, Maya Sapone ended the first half with three songs by William Bolcom: *Fur, George and Amor. George*, a song about a drag queen, has the inimitable line 'and stabbed him in the middle of *Un bel di vedremo*'. Words are important in Bolcom's witty songs and they came over very well indeed.

Aleksander Szram, who has won many awards and piano prizes, most notably the

Vlado Perlemuter Award in 2004, then performed some solo piano pieces. Federico Mompou's *Cancion y Danza*, a little impressionistic tone-poem, was followed by Frédéric Chopin's *Variations brillantes*, opus 12, based on the rondo from Hérold's opera *Ludovic*, completed by Halévy and premièred in Paris in 1833. This early work, which Chopin composed after attending the opera in 1833, received a vivacious performance by Szram on the beautiful sounding Bluthner piano. We are all indebted to Roger Willson, Chief Executive of Bluthner, for putting the premises and the piano at our disposal for the evening.

Maya Sapone returned to present the *Song of a nightclub proprietress* by Madeleine Dring to words by John Betjeman. It is quite a virtuoso piece and the final punch line was clearly enunciated. A song from *Les Misérables: I dreamed a dream* and another Cole Porter song *It's De-Lovely* were followed by two Neapolitan songs *Torna a Sorriento* and *O Sole Mio*, where the audience felt inclined to join in, but restrained themselves. The final song *The Alto's Lament* related the tale of the singer who so much wants to sing soprano roles, but at auditions is always told there is only a slot for an alto; she resents that because it is melody that she is after. Well, we got plenty of melody this evening and Maya Sapone with her lovely voice and characterful presentation charmed her audience and put them in the right mood for the journey home.



Our thanks go to Eugenie Maxwell, President of the Livery Club, Pastmaster Jonathan Rennert and Margaret Alford, then Deputy Clerk, for organising such a delightful event.  
Liveryman Adrian Mumford

young student 40 years ago, *Hodie Christus natus est*.

Pastmaster Jonathan Rennert, Musical Director at St Michael's, who arranges the concert every year, achieved the perfect balance between more vocally challenging pieces such as *In the bleak midwinter*, exquisitely sung by the fine choir, and carols for the whole congregation to sing. In between the lessons there was plenty of opportunity for the congregation to let rip with favourites like *God rest you merry gentlemen* and the final carol *Hark! the herald angels sing*. We were treated to some stunning descants written especially for the Musicians' Company by Jonathan Rennert and Sir David Willcocks. The organist Robert Smith, Assistant Director of Music at St Michael's, drew the service to a close with a magnificent, rousing organ voluntary which threw us back into our seats and then sent us on our way feeling wonderfully uplifted.

After an excellent supper at the Brewers' Hall we had the pleasure of listening to the young pianist, Samantha Ward, who is a Fellow of the Guildhall School of Music and a former recipient of the Company's Beethoven Medal and Maisie Lewis Fund Award. Continuing the Master's theme of celebrating the living composer, and new



Anna Meredith

music being heard against old, Samantha entertained us with Schumann and Albeniz interspersed by three short modern pieces written by Colin Matthews, John McLeod and David Sawyer. The evening heralded the start of the festive season and once again I was the beneficiary of another new fine musical experience, courtesy of the Musicians' Company.

Carolyn Wagstaff

**Footnote:** We were delighted to welcome the Master and Wardens of the Worshipful Company of Turners to the Carol Service and your Editors would like to draw our readers' attention to 'Wizardry in Wood 2008'. This is a comprehensive exhibition of turning presented by the Turners' Company at Carpenters' Hall in June 2008 at which Our Company will be assisting with the display of turned musical instruments.