

## MAISIE LEWIS CONCERT

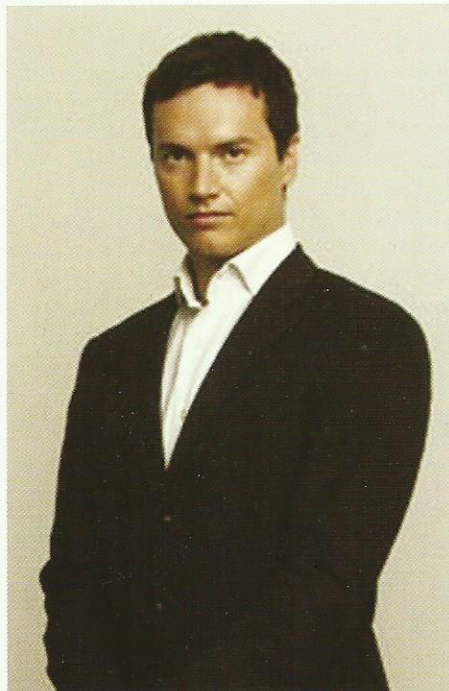
Wigmore Hall, 22 October 2007

I attended my first Maisie Lewis Concert with an added feeling of responsibility, as Maisie Lewis was the wife of the founder of the company I work for (Decca Records). This latest concert was shared between a tenor – the Australian Andrew Goodwin – and a pianist – the British Samantha Ward (both presumably in their 20s, though Samantha alone confessed to a year of birth). Both have picked up numerous prizes and awards on their way to early success.

Andrew opened the concert, offering two of Beethoven's most familiar songs – *Adelaide* and *Ich liebe dich*. Blessed with a fine-grained voice, clean-cut good looks and a mature stage manner, he immediately impressed with his ability to deliver long lyrical lines with assurance and ease. Though the voice has an operatic dimension, this was fine lieder singing, even if a little buttoned-up for these sometimes passionate songs. Then followed the first of Britten's Canticles, *My Beloved is Mine* – the metaphysical poet Francis Quarles's response to a verse from the Song of Solomon. The choice of text suggests (inevitably) a homoerotic

inspiration, though Britten's lean writing has little lust or physicality about it. Andrew's vocal control and poise were outstanding, as was his ability to negotiate the challenging bitonality between voice and piano. Again, there could have been more passion in the central section, but his quiet closing stanza was beautifully done.

There followed *The Secret Land* from Russian composer Leonid Desyatnikov. The programme asserted that Desyatnikov (born in 1955) had 'a distinctive and individual style' but this was not the case. Andrew delivered the piece sympathetically, but its superficial similarity (at least in mood) to the Britten did it no favours. In contrast, his final song in the first half was Poulenc's trifle *Paganini* – over before one could find the nonsense text in the programme. It provided a welcome moment of light relief, with Andrew adding a welcome smile. His contribution to the second half was all Russian – three love songs from Tchaikovsky, followed by four love (or at least lyrical) songs from Rachmaninov. He was clearly on home territory – the programme revealing that he had studied in Russia and, most remarkably, has already appeared as Lensky at the Bolshoi. Not only did his Russian sound satisfyingly true (you can sense this, even with no understanding of a language), but also he delivered emotionally powerful interpretations, adding the passion that had been absent earlier. Though the feel of the songs was somewhat similar, these were very enjoyable performances, and I must add that Daniel de Borah's piano support was excellent throughout, notably in the virtuosic piano



## IVOR MAIRANTS GUITAR AWARD 2007

Colin Cooper reports on its 10th anniversary

The first Ivor Mairants Guitar Award was made in 1997, with its founder (one of Britain's most active guitarists pre-war, principally in the dance bands of the period) presiding over the panel of adjudicators. Administered by The Worshipful Company of Musicians, the IMGA has come a long way since that first event, where I seem to remember that the adjudicators outnumbered the competitors. Some of the winners over the years have subsequently reached the highest levels of achievement. Their countries of origin reflect the international element: not only Britain, but China, Montenegro, Norway, Brazil, Greece and France.

It was a long-held ambition of Ivor Mairants, a liveryman of the Musicians' Company, to make classical guitarists more aware of the rhythms and harmonies of jazz, and generally to

strengthen the ties between the two cultures. The annual award that bears his name is the outcome of that ambition, and, having been in touch with it from the very beginning, I have no doubt that he would have been pleased with the overall development since that first occasion.

There is still a tendency for classical guitarists to treat a notated score as Holy Scripture. Some composers, indeed, expect that attitude. But jazz has different rules and conventions, and classically trained guitarists must come to terms with them if they are to venture into that area. It must be said, though, that those who played the Mairants piece (*Passacaglia for Passalacqua*, Passalacqua being the real name of the jazz guitarist Joe Pass) precisely as written did reveal a strong sense of the baroque in the design. One player produced an intriguing blend of baroque and jazz, ornamenting the

melody whilst at the same time dotting the rhythms. Other pieces played were Almeida's *Stantiana* and *Brazilliance*, Berkeley's *Theme and Variations*, Gerhard's *Fantasia* and Roussel's *Segovia*, all useful pieces to have in a young guitarist's repertoire.

The judges awarded the first prize to Fabricio Mattos, 24, who studied with Claudio Ferreira at the Escola de Música e Belas Artes do Parana in Curitiba, Brazil. He has well-developed and integrated hands, a secure sense of idiom, a large and potent measure of that fluent and natural-seeming rhythmical sense possessed by so many Latin-American guitarists, but perhaps above all a sense of being at one with his instrument.

Laura Husbands, 22 and a student of Allan Neave at The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, did so many things well that her second prize