

PLG Young Artists 4 at Purcell Room

Anna Picard

Since 1956 the Park Lane Group has showcased generations of rising soloists and ensembles, commissioning new works for them and reviving others that have gathered dust. Its January concerts have become an annual purgative, with kale-and-wheatgrass programming of the sort to make you crave something frivolous and calorific, perhaps by Offenbach. One arrives with a sense of duty and leaves feeling depressed, not least by works that seem to have been written to confound the properties of particular instruments. Except for those rare occasions when both the artists and the work that they have chosen have real ambition, ferocious intellectual and emotional engagement and savage beauty.

Marta Kowalczyk and Somi Kim's reading of Penderecki's Violin Sonata No 2 (1999) had all this and more. It was a great performance of a great work, powerfully argued and animated with a breathtaking range of colour, tone and inflection. The sonata opens with what sounds like a cadenza, as if midway through the first movement of a concerto. Kowalczyk's bruising pizzicato and muscular bowing dissolved into a muted sheen as Kim's first furious iteration faded, leaving the faintest smudge of harmony suspended in the air. The sly dances and hiccupy sobs of the Allegretto scherzando were deftly drawn. In the central Notturmo the duo's dynamic control was formidable. The danse macabre rhythms of the Allegro and audacious, aching lines of the Andante were fearlessly and faultlessly executed.

Szymanowski's orientalist *Nocturne* and bodice-ripping *Tarantella* (1915) were inevitably diminished by what had preceded them. In the first half, Ensemble Matisse delivered the world premiere of Cheryl Frances-Hoad's *Cloud Movements*, the harmonies tilting wistfully towards Messiaen, the counterpoint neat, alongside Poul Ruders's ungrateful *Vox in Rama* (1983) and Berg's 1935 arrangement of the Adagio from his *Kammerkonzert*. The clarinettist Rozanne Le Trionnaire, the violinist Francesca Barritt and the pianist Ellena Hale sounded relieved to be in more romantic territory, albeit post-romantic. All three sounded happiest in Kenneth Hesketh's breezy *Cautionary Tales* (2002). The advice contained in them is sound: wash properly; be careful in love; don't suck your thumb.