



bachtrack



## Staggering musicianship and maturity from Federico Colli

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*By David Truslove, 06 February 2015*

It is only since his success at the Leeds International Piano Competition in 2012 that Federico Colli has become familiar to a select group of devotees in the UK. Last year he appeared at the Queen Elizabeth Hall and more recently at the Barbican where he gave his London concerto debut, replacing an indisposed Yevgeny Subdin in Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto. Rave reviews have followed him everywhere. His growing stature has even prompted parallels with some of his great Italian predecessors: Arturo Michelangeli and Maurizio Pollini.



Federico Colli  
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Those hearing a hugely gifted artist at the start of their career will sense, hopefully, a wish to communicate, to explore new ideas and possibly even take risks, and delivery of repertoire that is routine and mechanical will not have developed. Thursday's performance by this dapper pianist, with his trademark cravat and slim build, was everything one could hope for from a rising star and his intelligent musicianship and mature approach was a joy to hear and watch.

The evening began with Mozart's *Six Variations on "Salve tu Domine"* drawn from Paisiello's virtually unknown opera *I filosofi immaginari*, first performed in Vienna in 1781. The elegance of Mozart's writing was shown to poetic effect where Colli breathed new life into Paisiello's original vocal lines. Perhaps also calculating that few in the audience would know the Mozart, he remained poised at the end of the variations, denying any appreciation and after a brief pause continued with the first of Schubert's *Four Impromptus*, D935. A masterstroke of body language (although some listeners clearly thought they might have misheard the number of variations) the transition brilliantly melded both sides of Vienna's musical heritage – and tonally merely segued from F major to F minor.

Here, in the opening bars, Colli added his own individual stamp, lingering on the first arpeggiated chord as if to emphasise the improvisatory aspect implicit in Schubert's title. Colli's choice of tempo might have rendered the repeated note main theme just a little pedestrian but the crossing of hands idea was all the more tender. In fact restraint underlined much of his playing in the first Impromptu, (as it had in the Mozart) and it was not until we heard his crisply accented chords of the second (in A flat) that a real forte dynamic appeared and with arresting effect. The five variations of the third Impromptu (B flat) were spell-binding, particularly in the second and last which, under Colli's fingers, sounded freshly minted in its delicacy and playfulness. Accents in the fourth Impromptu (F minor) were teasingly spiked and invigorated Schubert's dancing rhythms as if to remind us that amongst the composer's keyboard works over four hundred pieces are in dance form.

After the interval Colli marked the centenary of Scriabin's death with his *Sonata no. 10*, Op.70. Its densely-packed terrain, complete with obsessive intervals and trills is seemingly improvisatory in character, yet Colli managed to illuminate its taut single movement structure (written in 1913) across 12 minutes that traversed graceful to grandiose.

It was in the three-part tale of seduction, death and haunting apparition that is *Gaspard de la nuit* that most clearly demonstrated Colli's staggering technical facility. Ravel claimed that the challenges in this triptych were of "transcendental difficulty", but if so they were more than met by Colli in a near flawless performance. In the opening "Ondine" the deadly water nymph's melody emerged as spun silk, effortlessly weighted against its shimmering accompaniment; the incessant tolling bell in "Le gibet" was always supported by a finely judged tone. Lastly, it was Colli's towering virtuosity in the mercurial "Scarbo" that dazzled and almost made me forget that Ravel had intended this piece to be even more challenging than Balakirev's daunting *Islamey*.

Intelligence, imagination and immaculate technique made for a truly rewarding evening in performances that will have consolidated his elevated standing. It's no wonder he's been compared to Michelangi and Pollini.

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**Reviewed at University of Southampton: Turner Sims, Southampton on 5 February 2015**

#### **PROGRAMME**

**Mozart**, 6 Variations on "Salve tu, Domine", K398 (K416e)

**Schubert**, Four Impromptus in F minor, A flat major, B flat major and F minor, D.935

**Scriabin**, Piano Sonata no. 10, Op.70

**Ravel**, Gaspard de la nuit

#### **PERFORMER**

Federico Colli, *Piano*