Fabulous fluency

Michael Traub

Anton Nel's piano recital formed part of the recent Johannesburg International Mozart Festival, as well as being the first concert for 2014 of the long-running Johannesburg Musical Society.

The performance of Mozart's Sonata in D major, K.311, was slightly spoilt by a repeated mannerism - the dying away to a cadence, instead of leading strongly towards it. This made the music sound effete. Fluency, though, was not in doubt. Much more absorbing was Green by the American composer Alan Fletcher (born in 1956). This was the South African premiere of a piece composed in 2003. Its style was a kind of contemporary Impressionism - much like the mature works of Ravel. Nel played it with complete empathy. It was good to hear something new and worthwhile.

CONCENTRATION. Anton Nel in rehearsal for his Johannesburg International Mozart Festival performances. Picture: Supplied.

The first half of the recital closed with the Sonata in G minor by Schumann, not often heard, though it is the best of the three sonatas by the composer.

Nel made light of the technical difficulties, but the music still sounded as if it had too many notes. Estampes (Woodcuts) by Debussy is a suite of three pieces, each very different from the others in content.

info

Johannesburg International Mozart Festival

Recital: Anton Nel
Programme: Music by Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Debussy, Alan Fletcher
Venue: Linder Auditorium, Parktown

In this rendering, Pagodas came off best, its glassy iridescence well conveyed. Both Soiree In Granada and Gardens In The Rain could have been more colourfully realised.

The closing work was Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata. This work gives the pianist a thorough athletic workout through its transcendental technical requirements.

The Finale was taken at an unvarying tempo whatever the difficulties. Two encores followed: Widmung (Dedication) by Schumann-Liszt and the Scherzo-Valse by Chabrier.