

Rohan de Saram, Woodend Barn, Banchory
by Alan Cooper, The Herald

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Rohan de Saram's solo recital on Friday was a revelation. A glorious display of virtuosity, it exposed the contrasting approaches to unaccompanied cello of three very different composers. The first pieces that come to mind for this particular medium are the Cello Suites of JS Bach. Many great cellists have given their own personal interpretations of these works and de Saram was no exception. His performance could be called idiosyncratic, and his approach to rhythm and phrasing was certainly highly individual. This in itself held the audience spellbound: whatever was he going to do next? Yet his muscular playing was alive with richness of tone and a seemingly effortless concentration.

Luciano Berio's *Sequenza XIV* was composed expressly for de Saram and was years in the making. It opened with percussive effects based on Sri Lankan drumming, and the subsequent vast menu of sounds made by plucking, bowing or striking the strings or the body of the cello was mind-blowing. Yet every effect was bound into a totally cohesive sequence.

Best of all for the immediacy of its appeal was Kodaly's *Sonata Op 8*, which in some respects demanded more technical brilliance from the player than either Bach or Berio. Its many references to Hungarian folk music were thoroughly appealing and de Saram made the cello sound like a whole orchestra.

A thunderous response from the audience produced the Prelude from Bach's *Suite No 3* as an encore, and it sounded as fresh as if the concert had only just begun.