

theguardian

Gwilym Simcock

Good Days at
Schloss Elmau

★★★★★

(ACT)

Unaccompanied piano performance is a challenge 30-year-old Gwilym Simcock hasn't confronted since his childhood classical training, and one that's all the greater because it invites comparison with a significant personal influence: Keith Jarrett. But this highly varied set is more explicitly classical in its harmonic mobility and melodic flourishes and more elaborately composed than Jarrett's jazz work. Simcock can play so many things at once, while often developing pieces through progressions of modulations and changing motifs that a few listenings are required to tease it out. If this all-original and mostly first-take set has any drawbacks, they come from occasional over-elaboration and the odd hint of sugariness. But it's mostly an awesome solo debut. The chord-rammed blizzard of sound on Wake Up Call borders on free music, Northern Song recalls Django Bates's melodies and the bluesy, sublimely paced and faintly Mehldausque Gripper is surely one of the great contemporary jazz piano performances. **John Fordham**