

Gala Concert 23rd April 2010 at All Saints Church, Kempston

What an inspiring and enthralling concert! It was a privilege to listen to three outstanding musicians Louis Demetrius Alvanis, Elaine Huckle and Ian Clarke. We were awed by the brilliance of Louis' technique as he played the Partita No. 1 in B flat by J S Bach and the well known Sonata Appassionata by Beethoven. There was a vibrance in his playing of the Partita and we were all impressed by the contrast in dynamics. Louis managed very successfully to contrast the different dance forms of the Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. Never before have I heard a piece by Bach played so compellingly and we were all amazed at his technical accuracy in places where the music moved at a rapid speed. Louis' performance of the Appassionata left us spellbound. It is remarkable anyway to think that a piece of such passion, emotion and technical difficulty was written when Beethoven was having to come to terms with his progressive deafness. Louis played with such sensitivity, beauty and magic but when it came to the more tempestuous parts of the sonata, he showed such power in his playing that the sound filled the church. His crescendos were thrilling. We were delighted when Louis played one final piece as an encore and he turned to the more romantic style of Schumann. His rendering of 'Dreaming' was extremely sensitive and left us feeling serene and calm after some dramatic playing of the Beethoven sonata.

Rarely have I encountered a soprano who has communicated so effectively with the audience as Elaine. As the concert took place on St George's Day, Elaine chose music by Elgar and Ireland. She started her recital with three of the 'Songs from Sea Pictures' by Elgar. The words of 'In Haven' were written by the composer's wife Caroline and reflect the transcendence of Love over blind elemental forces. In 'Sabbath Morning at Sea' the singer is portrayed as being aboard a lonely vessel, contemplating first the contrast of untroubled sky and turbulent surface, then God who created both sea and man. In 'Where Corals Lie', the singer is turned away from mortal love by the pervasive lure of the sea. Elaine's interpretation of the songs was extremely expressive, so much so that with the piano accompaniment one could feel the different moods of the sea. Elaine showed great versatility in her singing and we appreciated the beautiful colours in her voice. There are probably not too many people who would be devotees of John Ireland but Elaine sang them with such sincerity and conviction that by the time she completed the seven songs I think that we were all converts. The songs included 'The Salley Gardens', 'The Scapegoat', 'Love and Friendship', 'What are you thinking of?', 'The Hearts Desire' and 'The Encounter'. Perhaps the most moving of them all was 'What are you thinking of?' Elaine related this to the son of a man depicted in a glass window of All Saints Church who had died young and also to the situation of those affected by the war in Afghanistan. Her rendering of the song was very sensitive and moving. Again we enjoyed some beautiful colours in her voice to represent the different moods of the songs. She showed great command in her rendition of songs that were extremely challenging. And what a superb ending to the concert with her operatic rendering of Joan of Arc by Tchaikovsky. We were left enthralled by her wonderful performance. And of course mention must be made of her accompanist Ian Clarke who played with great sensitivity, and one felt that there was very good understanding between pianist and singer which must have come about through hours of practice.

One aspect that we particularly enjoyed was the chance to speak to the three musicians after the concert. They all have a love of music which they wish to share with others and this was reflected in the setting up of the International Music festival. That love of music is seen very much in Elaine's concern to share her singing expertise with young people and to raise money for charity through her beautiful CD 'The Voice of Elaine Huckle.' Certainly we all left the concert with the joy of having listened to some outstanding and inspiring music and with the hope that we might have the privilege of hearing the three musicians play again in the not too distant future.

Paul Fricker