



A splendid week of music-making

East Finchley's 18th Arts Festival at All Saints Church in Durham Road wrapped up just as we went to press on last month's edition. You may have seen our festival photos but we ran short of space for reviews so we're putting that right this month with this round-up by our reviewer Ken Carter.

Organist Jennifer Bate, the All Saints Choir and Geoffrey Hanson

With our backs to the altar, we looked up towards All Saints' prized organ. The evening honoured the life of Jennifer Bate (70 years and still going strong). The organ displayed most delightfully the gentle charms of two fragments of Mendelssohn, the Choral from Duruflé's first organ work and Geoffrey Hanson's engaging *Salutamus diem natalem*, written for the occasion.

Geoffrey Hanson then took the All Saints' Choir on a sung journey through the devotions of Western Europe, visiting amongst others Byrd, Bruckner, Elgar and Britten

visit to All Saints. A highlight of the festival, of course, they can come every year.

Using the style of commedia del'arte, the director provided knockabout comedy, high grade slapstick, stylishly delivered, with visual jokes a-plenty. From the same handful of people we heard highly professional musicality.

"I've never heard the trio better sung," someone remarked to me during the interval. This was an evening of high jinks, cheek and consummate musicianship. PopUp delivered a flexible ear-catching romp which can be adapted to a village hall, a school or ... a magnificent, flamboyant late-Victorian parish church like All Saints.



Paprika. Photo Mike Coles

and concluding with his own work *To Cecilia*, to words by local resident Fleur Adcock. The choir sang gracefully and its two soloists certainly made their mark.

PopUp Opera: *Così fan tutte* (Everyone Does!)

This was PopUp Opera's third

Paprika

Fast, vigorous, electrifying folk-music from Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia jiggled the rafters. Melody was treated as by-the-by and dismissed rather brusquely, especially if it got in the way of any persistent, foot-stamping

beat.

A duo from the two accordions was a melodious relief. So was the dazzling cadenza-like display of fireworks from Bogdan Vacarescu, the leader, on the violin. The church swelled and surged with a quite terrifying and ceaseless jubilation ... a celebration of village vitality.

Shakespeare's Greatest Hits

Belinda Yates sang songs inspired by the Bard, ranging from Morley to Arne to Bernstein and Cole Porter. Her diction was impeccable, every word clear and well-projected. I found her more at home with the musicals than the earlier ditties. However, during the interval someone voiced an opposing view to me, finding the ditties fresh and the American music rather tired and automatic.

Lance Pierson spoke Shakespeare's words breezily, resolutely and with commendable resonance. Much was familiar: "Once more unto the breach...", "Friends, Romans, countrymen...". We heard him debating whether 'to be' or 'not to be'. His delivery sought to meet newcomers to Shakespeare halfway, at a steady pace. The performance was genial and avuncular, with real gusto. Heather Chamberlain accompanied all this with deft-fingered verve, from a discreet keyboard.

Centenary of 1914

Fleur Adcock and Donald Pelmear read war poems in the first half. The selection was wide-ranging including not only Owen, Sassoon, Thomas and Graves but also Kipling's lament for the loss of his son and five pieces by women poets.

The final spoken item was the citation for Jack Parr, resident of North Finchley and the first British soldier to die in 1914.

In the second half, Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*



The London Ripieno singers in full voice for *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Photo Mike Coles

was masterly. In the right hands, the music rings out with a pained, rugged authenticity, its rhythms ungainly, spare and haunting. The London Ripieno Singers and Players, under Geoffrey Hanson's direction gave this barely recognised masterpiece its due. I shall long remember the lamenting cries, the keening, of soprano Louise Eekelaar rising from out of the hulking chaos of war and the stentorian affirmation of bass Matthew Bernstein. This was the second highlight of the week.

Haydn Chamber Orchestra

George Butterworth finished *The Banks of Green Willow* in 1913 and was killed in battle three years later aged 31. The orchestra swam into this late-Romantic music warmly. Mozart's *Jeunehomme* piano concerto followed, K 271. Pianist Ivana Gavric gave

a captivating performance, aristocratic, nimble-fingered and fluent. The last movement raced along at a dazzling speed, reminding me of an express train hurtling through a station non-stop.

Bartok's *Divertimento for String Orchestra*, was born in 1939 and thus the second piece of the evening to be written on the eve of a world war. Here, though, Bartok was preparing to leave his Nazi-leaning Hungary to take up exile in America. The piece was technically difficult and often dissonant but with melodious harmonic moments. In this, the Haydn Chamber Orchestra was outstanding.

The evening finished in more relaxed mode with Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony* which he described to his sister Fanny as "the jolliest piece I have ever done". Bern Gernon and the orchestra caught the



The Haydn Chamber Orchestra with Ivana Gavric, piano. Photo Marian Harris

music's surging delicacy with exhilarating stylishness, a young man's jubilation.

The King's Men

The festival week ended with a mini-festival on its own, comprising seven singers and one organist from the Choral Scholars of King's College, Cambridge. There was nothing they could not do - as long as it suited male voices. They had Henry VIII, Lassus and Byrd... Duruflé, too.

The group specialised in their own spectacular arrangements of traditional and pop from English to Scottish, Irish and French. There was an American spiritual and pop, ranging from Cab Calloway to Michael Jackson and the Beach Boys. What a joyful conclusion to a splendid week of music-making!

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