



Festival openers: The Massive Violins. Photo Mike Coles



Fairy tale: Pop-up Opera's Hansel and Gretel. Photo Marian Harris

Nine days of musical high notes

Our music reviewer **Ken Carter** recalls the magnificence of the 21st East Finchley Arts Festival that drew appreciative audiences to nine days of art and music events at All Saints' Church, Durham Road, in October.

On the opening Saturday we heard The Massive Violins: seven cellists spread across the stage, giving us their own arrangements of tuneful songs for the family. They played, plucked and sang at a tripping pace with sprightly rhythms all the way. The house was full.

Sunday night was distinguished actor Robert Powell, no less, celebrating the life of Charles Dickens. Throughout, he stood at the microphone, unmoving, impassive, reading softly from a sheaf of texts.

Pianist Masayuki Tayama was a more dynamic catch the next evening. A specialist in Rachmaninov, his playing was clear and disciplined, evidence of being a teacher of distinction. His gentle Chopinesque encores showed his very human side, too.

Tuesday brought one of the week's highlights: six strings from the London Mozart Players. The string sextet is an awkward combination, tricky to write for, but we enjoyed three masters at work: Brahms *Sextet No. 1*, Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* and the first performance of festival director Geoffrey Hanson's *String Sextet*. The vibrant lushness of the Brahms and Tchaikovsky are well-known. Hanson's foray was quite different. Its texture was lighter, having an elastic springiness and charming, unexpected interventions. I long for a second hearing.

Kosmos gave us a jolly evening with music deriving from Celtic, Romanian, Greek and Balkan communities. We heard the tango, contemporary asides and much else.

Excellent performances followed from the powerful and melodic London Metropolitan Brass and the distinctive singer-songwriter Tim Arnold, both based in Muswell Hill.

Saturday brought the annual 'Come and Sing' event and this year it was Fauré. After an afternoon of rehearsals, the ad hoc choir sang a collection of short pieces and the famous *Requiem*. I appreciated their efforts to come to terms with Faure's refined elegance, punctuated with outbursts of controlled roughness and vigour.

The week culminated in Pop-Up Opera's joyous take on Humperdinck's best-known opera *Hansel and Gretel*. Polly Leech sang Hansel sturdily and laddishly; Sofia Larsson sang Gretel with silvery innocence; Ailsa Mainwaring made a splendid job of lively presentations of both Mother and Witch. The light and joyous mood of the whole enterprise was, however, especially due to Berrak Dwyer's ever-flowing piano, light and engagingly tripping.

A chance to meet your neighbours

Anyone who fancies spicing up their social life and meeting more local people may be interested in the North London Meet Your Neighbours group, a branch of the well-established London IVC social club which is just celebrating its 70th anniversary.

The North London branch has been active for more than three years, with nearly 2,000 members and over 400 events in that time. Activities include pub socials, restaurant visits, live music, parties and wine tastings.

There's a friendly pub social on the first Wednesday of every month at The Woodman pub, Archway Road, N6, next to Highgate tube station, starting at 7.30pm. Next dates are 3 January, 7 February and 7 March and new members are welcome to drop in.

For more information email Dave Lawrence at dave.lawrence@uclmail.net or phone him on 020 8444 6285. You can also find future events at www.meetup.com/North-London-Meet-Your-Neighbours.



Table talk: The North London Meet Your Neighbours group enjoys a meal together.

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