

Gala Concert for the Kempston and Biddenham International Music Festival Friday 1 July 2011

Those who attended the Gala Concert experienced music of outstanding quality. Many including the soloists remarked on the beautiful location for the concert which was at All Saints Church with its impressive nave and excellent acoustics. We were extremely fortunate to have as our soloists Ayako Yoshida (violin), Louis Demetrius Alvanis (piano) and Elaine Huckle (soprano) who was accompanied by Ian Clarke.

Ayako gave a very impressive and compelling performance of the 'Kreutzer' Sonata No 9 in A major for Piano and Violin by Beethoven, and the Sonata for Violin and Piano by Ravel, both very demanding pieces. She produces a very beautiful and resonant tone on the violin and has a wonderful mastery of technique. All her playing was very expressive and we were particularly impressed by the change in moods from the frenetic opening movement of the Beethoven Sonata, to the reflective mood of the second movement and the sense of joy and exuberance of the third. The same contrasts were evident in the Ravel. Ayako is an excellent communicator of music and her radiant personality came over in her performance.

We have had the pleasure of listening to Louis Alvanis in former concerts and his brilliance and virtuosity again left us spellbound. He was a superb accompanist for Ayako, and we were particularly impressed by his technical accuracy in the Beethoven sonata where the music moves at a rapid speed! Louis played the Chopin Ballade No 3 in A flat with great sensitivity and expression, especially in the lengthy introduction, and there was an effective contrast with the middle section. The Three Preludes by Gershwin also illustrated his masterly technique. In the first Prelude in B flat major, Louis brought out delightfully the syncopated rhythms based on the Brazilian baião. His sensitivity was shown in the second Prelude in C sharp minor with its subdued melody and bass line at the beginning and end. The third Prelude in E flat minor was played with complete conviction. We very much appreciated the informed comments that he made before playing the pieces.

It was such a joy to listen to Elaine. She is very expressive in her singing and produces such beautiful colours in her voice. She also communicates so effectively with the audience. Elaine started her recital with 'Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix' which is a very moving aria from the opera Samson and Delilah by Saint-Saens and we were impressed by her legato singing. She then performed 'The soldier's wife', 'Lilacs', and 'When silent night doth hold me' by Rachmaninov. She was not only able to encapsulate the different moods of the songs but she showed great versatility in her singing. Elaine concluded with 'Cinq Melodies Populaires Grecques' (Five Greek Folk Songs) by Ravel. The contrast between the songs was most effective. The more gentle moods of the second and fourth songs 'La-bas vers l'église' and 'Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques' contrasted so well with the more rumbustious third song 'Quel gallant m'est comparable' and the joy of the fifth song 'Tout gai'. There may not have been many in the audience who had heard these songs but Elaine gave such a compelling performance that

we were left enthralled. Of course mention must be made of her accompanist Ian Clarke who played with great skill and sensitivity. There was very good understanding between pianist and singer.

One aspect that we particularly enjoyed was the chance to speak to the four musicians after the concert over a buffet supper. 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. The Gala Concert was extremely well attended and the organisers intend to hold similar concerts next year. There will be three Master Classes for young people next year which will give them a unique experience of learning under musicians of international reputation. Certainly we all left the concert with the joy of having listened to some outstanding and inspiring music and we hope that we might have the privilege of hearing the four musicians play again in the near future.