



Octogenarian

Hello! Hello! Hello!

Hello and welcome to the 18th edition of the Octogenarian, your friendly reviewer and lobbyist for Bristol's music scene. Good to see you again, you're looking well.

This week Phil Harmonick attended the University Singers' latest concert, inwardly digested what he heard, formed opinions thereof, and proceeded to write them down in a flowing series of words and phrases. With a pen. The results of this lengthy and seemingly convoluted process are presented within.

Feathers are spat once again by Gwendolyn Winthrop, as she savagely attacks the protectionism of art music audiences. Style models for this section range from opinion columns to Viking war cries, and this special recipe can be enjoyed by belligerent mobs and Guardian readers alike. After Gwen's tirade, Desdemona Jones reviews the Wind Orchestra's amalgamation of science fiction and music, hovering uncomfortably in a crowd bisected into devotees of the two respective camps: The whole thing could have escalated into a bloodthirsty tussle of heavy metal t-shirts and ironic moustaches, had they not been too fat and lazy and we too delicate and too resolutely opposed to the iniquities of social stereotyping...

Next up is Philistines' Corner; the uncorrupted scientist Jammy McCoy has once again been coaxed from his test-tubes and beakers to offer his healthy critique of the Brodowski Quartet's Shostakovich concert. This performance was of such high quality that the rest of the team were afraid to touch it with our editorial barge-pole (which we do in fact own, and use on long voyages on the editorial barge to celebrate the printing of each new issue.)

Last week's crossword had two winners (read: two entrants) Chris Parton, who entered via email, and Phil Farr-Cox, who filled in the clues in front of the news-team in a café, to a backdrop of gently encouraging noises. Each was also obliging enough to point out a bit of sloppy clue writing on the part of Mr. Sunaway, who has been duly taken down a peg, and remains thoroughly ashamed of what he has done. Well done to you both, Galaxy Caramels all round. Have a go at this week's: it's better, the clues even work and everything. You could win a Cadbury's Fruit and Nut. They're lovely. You haven't had one of those for ages.

Coming up...

When?	Where?	Who?	What?	How much?
Friday 11 th May 19:30	St George's	Classical Opera	Mozart's <i>Apollo et Hyacinthus</i>	£29-14
Tuesday 15 th May 19:30	Colston Hall	Berlin Symphony Orchestra	Sibelius, Symphony no 5.	£31-£1
Wednesday 16 th May 19:30 - 21:30	Victoria Rooms, Auditorium	Contemporary Voices	New and established contemporary compositions for voice, electronics, cello and piano.	Free
Friday 18 th May 19:30	Colston Hall	Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain	???	£24-20
Thursday 24 th May 20:00	St George's	Trio Mediæval and Arve Henriksen (trumpet)	Medieval music and Scandinavian fòlk songs.	£19

Please feel free to brighten our bleak and fragile existences by writing to octogenarianbristol@gmail.com with any thoughts you might have. Please.

Wednesday 9 May, 13:15-14:00

Auditorium, Victoria Rooms

Bristol University Singers

I'm really not a singer in any way, shape, or form. I only ever sing in two specific circumstances: 1) in the shower, with the proviso that my flatmates are (for their own sake as much as anything else) out, or 2) under the influence of copious amounts of alcohol (preferably Southern Comfort, although a couple of VKs will do just as well). I admit, therefore, that this review of the Bristol University Singers lunchtime concert on Wednesday will be based upon my own aesthetic taste, albeit expressed in slightly more sophisticated way than simply saying "Oooh, didn't that sound nice?".

Having taken my seat in the packed-out Auditorium, I began by perusing the programme. As is to be expected from two of the University's foremost Meistersingers, David Allinson and David Bednall (potential stage-name: 'The Two Davids' - '(tuning) fork-handles?') The programme consisted of a plethora of songs in a wide variety of styles, ranging from the light-hearted madrigals of Josquin to the emotional poignancy of Michael Tippett. The concert was opened by the latter of these two composers in a performance of his 'Five Negro Spirituals', directed by David Bednall.

Let's start with the basics - it sounded good. The choir's voices meld together perfectly, yet keeping each part clearly audible within the whole, and are solidly unified under the clear direction of David Bednall. From the layman's point of view, the five-song opener was aesthetically pleasing to the ear.

I do have a slight issue here, however, with the choice of programme. The 'Five Negro Spirituals' were intended by Tippett as some form of communal expression, similar to that of the Bach Passions. If these are indeed communal folk songs and the composer intended them to act as such, surely their inclusion in a formal programme and performed, effectively, by the elite, is slightly incongruous.

However, this is not an article about the morality of music - were it, I could (and, in the past, have) go on for pages and pages - tea/biscuit break - and pages. Setting aside such issues, the singers excelled; the performance was touching. The next three works in the programme - Gibbon's *What Is Our Life?*, Ramsey's *How Are The Mighty Fallen* and



Monteverdi's *Lasciatemi Morire* - continued the serious undertones set by the first, now directed by David Allinson. I noticed a marked difference in conducting styles: In comparison to Bednall, Allinson's style seems a lot more florid, though not in any way superfluous. David Allinson has a way of appearing physically immersed in the music, shaping each phrase and flowing with them. In any event, the singing continued to impress, with the choir surpassing themselves as the concert continued. The Monteverdi was particularly impressive - a short but expertly-realised combination of text and music, which the singers conveyed perfectly.

The next two pieces in the programme though, - a pair of Josquin madrigals, described by David Allinson as 'deliriously silly' - left me feeling a little underwhelmed, and not remotely silly. The biggest problem was that the change in style was not represented physically - the singers all looked so serious, as if they weren't feeling the silliness at all! This was particular problematic in the first madrigal - had the programme note not informed me that it was intended as something of a joke, I probably wouldn't have realised. The second was only saved from a similar fate by its inclusion of the more familiar light-hearted madrigalisms - copious amounts of fa-la-la-ing and call-and-response style imitation.

The final work in the programme - Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* - was perhaps better suited to the choir's singing style. Compared to the previous two songs, the singers really came alive here in a big way, perfectly complemented by the Music Department's digital organ, which, it must be said, did a very good job of impersonating an acoustic instrument. The sheer power behind this work greatly surpassed anything that had been presented previously and made for an explosive end to a programme comprised of myriad different styles of vocal composition. Final impressions? Positive, of course! Setting aside my reservations regarding programming, the concert was an absolute pleasure to attend, with each and every piece in the programme performed flawlessly. I could genuinely sit and listen to the University Singers for hours, instead of the forty-five minutes offered here. Good stuff!

Phil Harmonick

Rant of the Fortnight

Depressing headlines are always the lot of classical music. There's the rhetorical 'Are Live Concerts Dying?', the oh-so-rebellious 'Has Opera Ceased to be Relevant?' and the occasional light at the end of the tunnel: 'Classical Music is not Dead.'

About three percent of the population listens to classical music: Sadly, the genre has lost some of its former stature and status. The industry cries out in despair; 'If we could only push it to four percent, we would be saved!' Just like Gandhi said: 'You must be the change you wish to see in it world. Well, not every day. But perhaps sometimes.'

Clearly the problem is not the people who don't listen to classical music. The problem is those who do listen to classical music - the problem is us. Let's blame the concertgoers for once.

How would you walk, talk and act if you thought 'The whole world will listen to classical music!' Every day when you left your house you would think 'Today I will show one person the wonders of the Shostakovich string quartets and they will be converted'. Not only would your attitude itself be worthy of a Nobel Peace Prize and your life resemble a 1930s musical, but every time you succeeded, the world would be just a little bit better. There would be just a little bit less Justin Bieber. Imagine if we all joined forces - imagine what we could do.

A confession should be made at this point. I am one of those horrible people who think that we can do something good in this world. I was afraid that studying for a degree in music would take that away from me, but luckily I have realised that this is not true. I can make this world a better place, and I will start by converting one of the 106,000 people who have liked Rebecca Black's 'Friday' on YouTube.

I told a friend about my new mission and she expressed worry over my plan, claiming 'Then you would have the whole serial-killers-love-classical-music problem'. There was no scepticism as to whether we would succeed or not (and let me point out, this is a very sceptical person) - she wanted to keep the integrity of our small group. This is the great thing about our tiny, exclusive group of music-listeners; we are just so much better than everyone else.

Imagine the kids from *Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents* listening to Shostakovich on their iPods on the way to Ayia Napa. Or a bit of Wagner blasting out from the stereo in the cool Porsche driving past. Or Mozart dance music playing in Lizard Lounge. Maybe the last example is taking it all a bit too far, but you get my point. Let's change the world. And let's change the atmosphere of our classical music gang - I'm getting tired of the old, conservative faction in our group. I imagine Justin Bieber and I would be best friends if he liked classical music.

Gwendolyn Winthrop

Friday 4 May, 13:15 - 14:00

Auditorium, Victoria Rooms,
Wind Orchestra
A Sci-Fi Spectacular

I'm going to be honest here: As soon as I saw the programme notes for the latest Wind Orchestra offering, I died a little inside. It's not that I had any particular objection to the concert repertoire (Except 'I see you' from *Avatar*. Whoever penned that monstrosity should be shot.) but 'May the 4th be with you' and 'Through the (light) years'!? Dear lord, it sounded more like quotes from a *Star Wars* convention. With clichés like that, you would be expecting people to be talking in Klingon when you arrived.

Faced with this truly terrifying thought, and praying that I wouldn't be crushed under legions of *Star Wars* fans, I braved the concert. Although there were (thankfully) not many people talking in Klingon, and (unfortunately) no one from the cast of *The Big Bang Theory* in sight, there were plenty of enthusiastic sci-fi fans. Rather tragically, a lot of them seemed to be sitting in front of me. With my enthusiasm for sci-fi waning at every given moment, my ears burning from avid discussions about the top ten *Star Trek* episodes, and the music snob in me wanting desperately to tell them that 'whooping' was not allowed, it was a relief when the music finally started.

Unfortunately, the first tune didn't quite seem to live up to expectations. Although, I acknowledge, a lot of this was down to the weak arrangement of the piece and therefore not the fault of either the orchestra or the conductor, David Batsman, both of whom, it was clear from the audience, were having a huge amount of fun playing it. (David Batsman seemed to be having too much fun in fact!)

The orchestra seemed to struggle their way through the



Star Wars themes and it was almost painful to listen to. From this, I almost believed that the whole concert would go downhill from there. Thankfully, I was very, very wrong. Although the whole concert suffered from weak arrangements, the orchestra did, after the *Star Wars* fiasco, play very well and obviously with great enthusiasm. 'I see you' from *Avatar* was, I admit grudgingly, well played and seemed to confirm, both to myself and the sci-fi fans, that the concert was back on track. It was a lighter touch in the concert programme, and it worked well in between the two brass-heavy pieces. 'Jupiter' from the *Planets Suite* was a little slow for my taste but once again well played by the ever-enthusiastic orchestra.

By that time, I was actually starting to get into the sci-fi mood. The music snob in me was losing and I was drawn along by the sheer energy in the hall. When we got to the ending, I was disappointed when it seemed the conductor wouldn't do an encore. Fortunately he eventually did, and *Back to the Future* was played (Cue squealing from sci-fi fans in front). I have to say, by that time, I was having too much fun to care how well the orchestra played. I was simply carried away by enthusiasm of everyone in that hall. Although the music played wasn't the cream of the musical crop, it was the amount of fun that everyone had that counted. Yes, I am now the one quoting clichés. The department should definitely have more concerts like this.

Desdemona Jones

Philistines' Corner

Wednesday 2 May, 13:15-14:00

Auditorium
Brodowski Quartet
Shostakovich String Quartets



"I'm sorry about that, man," began the Ed as soon as I traipsed once more into his office. He must have seen the deeply hurt expression I had adopted to make it clear I didn't appreciate being misled. Inside, I'd secretly really enjoyed the concert, but I deliberately adopted an air of standoffishness to make him feel bad.

"It's alright, I suppose," I grumbled, scowling like a particularly unimpressed lobster.

"I've got something to cheer you up, though," he smiled, evidently unaware that this was not my default facial expression. "It's a string quartet. Have you heard of Escala?" The all-female group of insanely attractive string players? Of course I had.

"Well, this is a bit like that. Interested?"

Did he really expect an offer like that to appeal to my base male instinct and cause me to leap upon an opportunity for such misogynistic, lowbrow reasons as ogling a group of hot (though obviously very talented) young ladies for an hour and a half?

Well it did, and I went.

First of all, far be it from me to make comment on the attractiveness of the Brodowski quartet. I'm not sure what the Ed was implying, seeing as three quarters of the quartet were *dudes*. Words will be had, I can promise you that.

On a serious note, I once again hugely enjoyed myself. The first piece, String Quartet No. 7 in F sharp minor, was a deeply unsettling piece that veered between brooding menace and

sharp, spiky attacks of sound, with slow meandering sequences and darkened harmonies giving way to roughly plucked strings and violently slashed, hacking notes. In my opinion, it would be a perfect soundtrack for a silent movie version of a horror film. Imagine Buster Keaton's take on *Leatherface*. Actually, don't. It's a horrible image.

If the first could be thought of as 1920s slasher movie music, then the second could soundtrack the psychotic villain's dastardly plot coming to a head. Less spiky but more interesting, the tension builds and builds, with brooding, quietened sections of tentative pizzicato (Hey, look! A music word!) and rumbling cello, up to a breaking point at which a dramatic vaudevillian riff is belted out that is so nefarious you can practically hear the twirling of villainous moustaches. So catchy was this section that I heard many people whistling the tune around the Vic Rooms for a long time after the performance. I would have joined them, but unfortunately I cannot whistle.

The Brodowski Quartet as an ensemble are sheer clinical excellence. Every single aggressive note was tight and perfectly executed, and even when the cellist had a minor issue with his bowstrings, he nonchalantly flicked the offending string aside, when someone like me would have had an aneurism from panic. It is worth giving special mention to the first violinist, who appeared to have cultivated the most perfectly shaped hairstyle to his profession, an energetic flop of a fringe that danced immaculately 'pon his head with its every shake, in time to his virtuoso playing style.

Once again, the Ed was right. Escala or no Escala, I left the performance very pleased to have been there. I even attempted to whistle my favourite part until an old lady thought I was having an asthma attack while pouting and attempted CPR. Swings and roundabouts, eh?

Jammy McCoy

News and Events

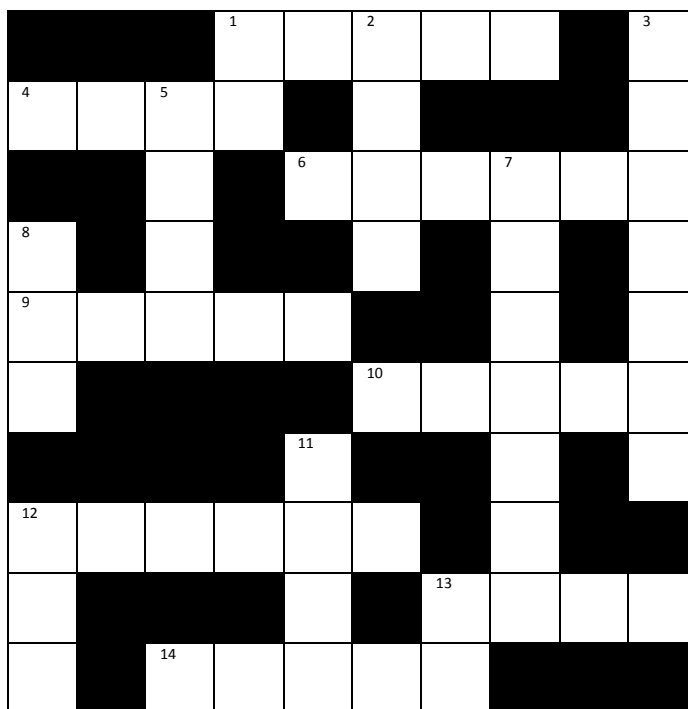
- The *Octo* offers its congratulations to BOpS for their production of *Pirates of Penzance* at Manor Hall last week. The performance was incredibly well handled by conductor Lucy Armstrong, and maintained momentum for the whole duration of its pageant of swaggering camp. In celebration of their success, this week's pamphlet can be sung in its entirety to the tune of the Major-General's song. Probably.
- The music department has conducted an experiment in which participants were asked to distinguish between an authentic graphic score and a thing that I drew at four o'clock Thursday morning after drinking three-quarters of a bottle of gin and eating a Chomp. The results, with their 100% accuracy rate, completely undermined the ironic point this experiment tried to make. This has since been attributed to the fact that one of the scores was written in felt-tip on the back of a kebab wrapper.
- Since the government outlawed the minor third last week, several legal loopholes have begun to emerge. An underground jazz club in North London was amongst the first to face a raid, but all involved were eventually acquitted due to evidence that the thirds in use were 'neither major nor minor'.
'These issues cannot be taken lightly', says a spokesman for the London Met's new Harmony Division, 'jazz musicians are not above the law, and tighter regulations may be required to put a stop to this intolerable fence-sitting'.
- If you listen really carefully, there's a great recipe for Chili Con Carne hidden in Steve Reich's *New York Counterpoint*.
- This pamphlet uses the word 'music' 35 times, and the word 'moustache' 3 times (including that one).

Across

- Haydn's *Creation* announced the arrival of this with an enormous fortissimo C major chord. (5)
- Stockhausen looped this. (4)
- Russian autocrat hates muddled music. (6)
- See 1 down.
- Instrument: Stair (anag.) (5)
- See 1 down
- Boulez' diagnosis for Schoenberg. (4)
- Speeds. (5)

Down

- Mozart opera. 1 down, 9 across, 13 down, 12 across (2,5,2,6)
- Bach wrote a lot of chorales for this German deity. (4)
- Schubert's Miller loved to do this. 'Das ___'. (7)
- Plucked strings. (4)
- If you study music, everyone is surprised when you say you have one of these. (7)
- Fine. (3)
- Bass, snare or kettle ___. (4)
- '___ Four'- Musical scousers want to hold your hand. (3)
- See 1 down.



Crossword by Jay Sunaway

Answers to octogenarianbristol@gmail.com to win a Cadbury's Fruit and Nut!