



Octogenarian

Bienvenu, bienvenu, bienvenu!

Bienvenu to the 3rd issue of *Octogenarian* – your friendly reviewer and lobbyist for Bristol's music scene.

This week has seen Russians a-plenty visiting Bristol, from the reserved delights served up by cellist and musicologist Dr. Elizabeth Wilson to the triumphantly bearded Moscow State Symphony Orchestra. Rant of the bi-week returns with the crushing polemics of Messieurs Pol and Pot and as part of the Southville arts trail held this weekend there is some mention of community music (in the loosest sense). All this to come, however, allow me a little ramble (Ronnie Corbett in the Dales) on a nugget of relevant thought inspired by Dr. Elizabeth Wilson's Loveday Lecture given at the Victoria Rooms on election day, (which was by-the-by truly terrific – they had outstanding nibbles).

Dr. Wilson explained that the restrictive, oppressive culture in 60's Soviet Russia lead to a desire, even a hunger for access to Western music. As one of the few Western students at the Moscow conservatoire Dr. Wilson told of the pressure she was under to provide glimpses of scores by naughty Western composers. The 'forbidden fruit' syndrome meant that students – in between wrist-slaps for replacing practice time with sleep – found the time to research Stockhausen's latest whim, read incomplete details of what Boulez had for breakfast, analyse the toilet habits of Messieurs Webern and Berg. It occurred to me that in *our* society, where Adorno's exasperation holds true one cannot *escape* culture (and more than this where 'culture' can mean farting into a trumpet with the intention of proving that sonata form (or the artists trousers for that matter) is no longer a valid construct) and where we are allowed to listen to practically anything (notable exceptions being Cliff Richards *Prayer* and Allah and the Mohammeds version of *White Christmas*) without being accused of treachery against the state we have almost entirely lost interest in contemporary music! This leads me to a paradoxical conclusion – ban modern music. Ban it all! – In a final, desperate bid to get people to actually listen to the stuff, all contemporary music is hereby banned... beginning tonight at *Elektrostatic* (Colston Hall 8pm). This is the only way to get that most conservative of demographics – modern students – to take any interest in contemporary music at all.

Thank you.

NB// Editor wishes to apologise for the preachy tone of recent issues/the last two issues. Deadlines are such that to write with a considered, pithy & entertaining lilt would simply take too long, hence these drawn out over-explained opinions with no substance. Here comes another - I can't BELIEVE that so many students voted Tory... Wankers!

Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, Pavel Kogan
(cond.), Igor Tchetuev (piano) ☆☆☆☆
Tuesday 11 May 2010, Colston Hall

Colston Hall, unusually, was completely packed this evening. Arriving shortly before the concert started, I was given a seat on the very front row of the stalls, and as the orchestra took to the stage it transpired that my field of view would consist almost entirely of one cellist. Who, for the purposes of this review will be known as Derek. (Being a poor student I couldn't afford a programme to find out his real name. The Octogenarian also didn't take too kindly to my last expenses claim, which included provision for a moat, duck shelter, and moat for the duck shelter (or 'pond', if you will); sadly not for a diary to ensure the contemporaneity of any topical jokes.)

I spent most of Borodin's Polovtsian Dances staring at Derek's shoes, which frankly could have done with a polish (this in sharp contrast to Pavel Kogan's which, despite being black, were brighter than the sun). Had I not neglected to leave my shoe-shining kit at home on this particular occasion, I could probably have made a good job of at least Derek's left shoe without him even knowing. Fair play to his desk partner though, who appeared to be wearing slippers.

Given his proximity, any initial misgivings regarding Derek being neither young nor female were swept away in the romance of

Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto no. 2, undoubtedly the reason for the full house. By its end, I became saddened at the thought that Derek would soon be departing; that I too would have to return home, alone. All by myself. (I'll be here all week; try the veal.)

For the second half I dragged myself away to a seat high up in the balcony. The sound had actually been pretty good at the front, only the violins being slightly lost as I was quite far over on the cello side. But this new viewpoint revealed the full majesty of the orchestra, and ? to my childish delight ? the completely mental playing of the female snare drummer. The violence of Shostakovich's Tenth, played with an often vicious energy, provided a great contrast to the previous works.

There is something wonderful about hearing musicians perform music of an idiom to which they have such an obvious inner connection; the three pieces here may not have been played perfectly, but in the hands of this Russian orchestra they simply felt right. With a total of four encores (one given by Igor Tchetuev at the end of the first half), the concert was certainly good value too.

Dee S.C. Aitch

The Bi-Weekly RANT:*Enraged leanings of Messieurs Pol and Pot:***Lunchtime Concerts**

I defy any of our readers to come up with a higher manifestation of Western culture than the lunchtime concert. What more 'civilised' way could there be to spend one's lunch hour than listen to world-class live music? A refreshing and invigorating transcendental moment in the busy schedule of, as the French have it, '*metro-boulot-dodo*' (metro-job-bed). What better opportunity for music-lovers to get a fix of that insatiable love, to experience their *raison d'être* in all its splendour and intimacy? And yet the stalls of St. George's are devoid of the hoody-wearing early-20s enthusiasts one might expect from the Music students of Bristol Uni. Why is this? Ah yes: it's nearing exam time, they must all be buried in their books from dawn till dusk, working tirelessly in order to do themselves, their parents and their University proud. Wrong. Any one working seriously hard realises the need for refreshment in the middle of the day, even if it means getting up earlier in the morning, or going out later in the evening. The real reason why they pass up these (often free) opportunities is because they prefer standing in the queue at Sainsbury's, waiting to use the self-service machines (they're NOT quicker) or plonking themselves on the steps of their beloved Vic Rooms in order to exchange pleasantries with their compadres and moan about the work they're not doing. Of course this scratches the surface of a much deeper running problem with today's society; but in this instance, there can only be one answer: they do not love music. Death to apathy. Death to pretence. Death to hypocrisy. Viva la Musica.

GO TO LUNCHTIME CONCERTS.

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
Colston Hall, 22nd April



In a programme packed with 'popular classics', Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture* began the evening's music. Best known as 'that one off the Ariel "Down to Thirty" advert', this piece, and many others like it is an example of a fairly good piece of classical music that has been high-jacked by the 'evil' of *Classic FM* and the image of classical music they seem to portray. The easy-listening nature of the piece seemed to have the worst possible effect of the orchestra, as they laboured through with insipidity, satisfying only the least discerning listeners.

Although they did at least maintain my consciousness in an accomplished -though unexciting- performance of Fauré's *Pavane*, power and conviction were still lacking. The orchestra seemed to express the same amount of apathy for this clichéd piece as two mid-table teams in an end-of-season football match.

There was more quality to be found in Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* but a lack of orchestral power gave little support to the violinist Tamsin Little, whose mosquito-esque high notes didn't quite match the warmth of the lower sostenuto sections.

Though I had been more optimistic about Sibelius's *Symphony No. 5*, it was a yet again a rather disappointing rendition. The first time I felt truly involved in the music was right at the end of the last movement, as the

trombones' input seemed to rouse the rest of the orchestra into some more impassioned playing for the final minute.

Sibelius's music, like that preceding it, was poorly communicated to the audience and therefore did not have the impact it should have. These were tired renditions that relied on the music to affect the players into giving a better performance rather than the orchestra bringing the music to life for the audience. The programme itself may have partly been at fault in that it was very well known and popular but the BSO ultimately failed to elevate the music from the plaguing cliché of *Classic FM* 'Relaxing Classics' pretentiousness.

Sigmund Bartoš

Schubert Ensemble - Schumann's Piano Quintet**Thursday 29 April 1pm, St George's**

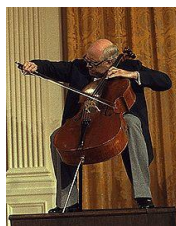
The members of the audience at this St. George's Lunch hour concert were treated to a unique, original and wholly fulfilling musical outing; one as educational as it was enjoyable. The Schubert Ensemble, made up, in this instance, of the elements which constitute a piano quartet, delighted both the ears and the minds of the avid audience with a concert entitled *Exploring Schumann's Piano Quartet*. In the first half, in a language as succinct and marvellously accessible as it was amicably presented, the ensemble performed excerpts from this delicate chamber work illustrating Schumann's compositional prowess and perfection of style. The performers interchanged in the task of enthusing, and illuminated Schumann's motivic transformations throughout the work, explored his musical language and unpicked his varying textures in a manner that was highly accessible though never condescending, amusing though never glib, and detailed though never irrelevant. The second half was an entire performance of the work, in which the ensemble radiated a real love and tenderness in their interpretation which showed an attachment to it that was undeniably thanks to their careful nurture and continuous study of it. It was refreshing (as a non-performer) to see performers truly musically engaging with a work, as opposed to simply going through the motions of a piece; something that, alas, one feels rather too often is the case. It was also refreshing to see an audience's musicality being fed and not simply indulged. It was also refreshing that it was free. A remarkably refreshing and invigorating experience, really. Oh, yeah, and the piece is seriously beautiful as well. Especially after exploration.

Edgar U. K. Thion

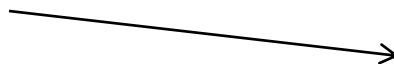
And Finally...

Congratulations this week must go to Dr. Pauline Fairclough who has achieved the status of grand-tutee of Russian luminary Mstislav Rostropovich. This comes following the receipt of a 'cello lesson from Dr. Elizabeth Wilson, a student of Rostropovich in the sixties. We now look forward to witnessing the results of this exciting development. One can only hope that the expectations of students and staff alike can be met, and that the weight of responsibility does not extinguish her musical flame.

Illustration showing lineage of 'cello tuition:



M. Rostropovich



E. Wilson



P. Fairclough



A. Cello

We welcome submissions of reviews from all; to submit a review, to write regularly or to receive this publication by e-mail please contact: ak6750@bristol.ac.uk

CoMA South-West



Saturday 8 May 8pm, Southville Methodist Church Hall

"If a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing badly" - Gustav Holst (the G-man)

I have long agreed with this sentiment. Perhaps with a reputation as an enthusiastic 'bodger' and being secretly cripplingly lazy this is not surprising. But I've always felt that the more common expression "if a thing is worth doing at all, it's worth doing well" is incredibly exclusive. Only those who are good have the right to try? The Marx brothers were terrible engineers and much worse pilots, they flew very badly indeed but it was of course worth doing...

This is not to say that CoMA's performance on Saturday evening was bad, (whether it was 'bad' or not is even less relevant when reviewing an amateur ensemble than usual) far from it; I had a very good time. Though was this to do with the concert capping off a lovely afternoon spent looking at people's homes rather than the art they displayed there, trying to prove how good a person I am to the ever-so-friendly-if-a-little-judgmental hemp salesmen and dodging 'showers' with cups of tea and dodgy Guacamole (experiences familiar to those that have followed the Southville Arts Trail before)... OR was it because of an intense, transcendent experience brought on by the integrity, purity and soul of the music performed? We will never know and you will probably never care.

CoMA South-West is a group of amateur players with a commitment to contemporary music. This concert saw them play two works commissioned by the group, "two new pieces from Poland", three short pieces by Jean

Hasse, Nymans *In C Interlude* and a Carter piano work. The opening *Frantic Fanfare* was exciting and set the evening off on the right, fun foot. Later in the concert another Jean Hasse piece - *Leaning* - proved the highlight of the evening; played first by the ensemble it was this piece that proved the capabilities of committed, if not entirely technically adept performers when given the right score and it worked well when the conductor turned on the audience and asked us to join in for a second playing - a difficult request managed well and with notable success; very few audience members were left silently squirming. The success of the ensemble sound in this piece turned out to be only a glimpse at the capabilities of the group however as the longer pieces performed were at times rather scratchy, and the (deceptively difficult) rhythmic precision required to impress with Nymans's piece was lacking. The only area of genuine criticism can be levelled at some odd decisions, to play a solo piano piece on a very, very quiet midi keyboard was perhaps not the best use of four minutes. It was a shame that so difficult a piece played consummately by music student Josh 'Harold' Bishop was practically inaudible and played on an instrument of incorrect range. Regardless, the audience enjoyed a fun and fine concert of contemporary music - so difficult to find for free.

Boris Haberknacker.

Octogenarian	When?	Where?	Who?	What?
	8pm Wednesday 12 May	Colston Hall £7 student	ElektroStatic: Re-thinking the band	Barnard/Get the Blessing
Fortnightly	6.15pm Wednesday 12 May	St. George's £2 CAVATINA (student)	Prof. Brian Foster, Jack Liebeck (violin)/Ashley Wass (piano)	Einstein's Universe Mozart/Brahms/Bloch
Concert	1pm Thursday 13 May	St. George's £5 student	Sophia Lisovskaya (piano)	Scarlatti/Schumann/Chopin/Scriabin
	1pm Thursday 20 May	St. George's FREE CAVATINA (student)	Lucille Burns and the Franke Ensemble	Villa-Lobos/Tomasi/Ravel
Listings	8pm Sunday 23 May	The Junction, Stokes Croft 50% at £10 or less	The New Parnassus Club DJs/Voller Quartet	Who knows...?
And				
Bingo Bonanza	Pick of the Nose 7.30pm Friday 21 May	St. George's £11 students or £5 BUMS	Chamber Orchestra of Basel/Angela Hewitt (piano)	J.S.Bach/Martin