

Review of Music on Sundays Concert 26 June 2011

CHICHESTER STRING ENSEMBLE leader Mark Hartt-Palmer; conductor Louis Halsey; Frances Kelly (harp), Kirsty Shewan (trumpet), Benedict Rogerson & Patrick Greenlees (cellos)

PACHELBEL Canon (solo violins: Mark Hartt-Palmer, Chris Darwin, Anna Ruijterman)

TORELLI Trumpet Concerto in D

VIVALDI Double Cello Concerto in D minor

DEBUSSY Danse Sacree et Danse Profane, for harp & strings

MAHLER Adagietto (from Symphony No 5)

TCHAIKOVSKY Serenade in C

The Music on Sundays audience was presented with a nicely varied programme of music for strings and solo instruments. The three baroque pieces that opened the concert display contrasting styles, and the three romantic-era works that followed inhabit very different emotional worlds. And how often will you hear four different concertante instruments in a chamber concert?

Each of the seven soloists acquitted themselves splendidly, and it was a privilege to have Louis Halsey, one of England's finest choral conductors, take charge of an orchestra which soon impressed with sprightly, pointed playing at the start of the Torelli and some graceful phrasing in the largo of this cheerful little concerto. The players were equally at home in the more serious Vivaldi piece, in a performance notable for its poised slow movement and sturdy final allegro.

Debussy wrote a lovely sonata for harp (with flute and viola) as well as these delectable dances. What a pity this music is not better known. Harpist Frances Kelly joined the Chichester String Ensemble in a characterful performance: gravely beautiful in the sacred dance and modestly sensual in its companion piece. Perhaps the highlight of the afternoon was a Mahler Adagietto which dispelled any doubts that this sorrowful masterpiece, written for the strings of a full symphony orchestra, could work when played by a chamber ensemble. The players produced the requisite weight of tone in an expressive performance which the conductor kept flowing from start to finish, and the result was a moving experience.

The Tchaikovsky is the most popular string serenade of all, and, in this highly accomplished reading, proved the ideal conclusion to the afternoon's entertainment. Its success owed much to the high degree of rhythmic control, and the quick tempo chosen for the famous waltz ensured enough contrast with a flowing elegy, which can seem self-pitying when taken too slowly. The joyfully bouncing finale provoked enthusiastic applause from a large audience at yet another successful Sunday concert.

PHIL JENKINS

