

From "Essential Reading"

Review for prestigious concert, Menuhin Hall Surrey.

First the Hall and the great man himself--

The audience packed themselves last night into an acoustic dream of a concert hall, the brand-new Menuhin Hall.

Outside the hall we were surrounded by thought provoking and historic memorabilia of the great genius himself, Yehudi Menuhin.

His projects, his dreams, his relationship with humanity, his relationship with his devoted family, his playing genius; it is all so fascinating and inspiring. He embraced the new, the challenging, the different, whilst remaining the great classical violinist... one of the greatest of all time.

He embraced those who were perceived to be different for whatever reason.

The endorsement of Nelson Mandela is a dream testament to this, as Menuhin took on the challenge of apartheid and put on concerts freely or a rejected part of society. His embracing of Eastern Music, of Jazz, with his stunning duets with Grappelli on Michael Parkinson were a testament to his open-mindedness. His practical concern for those who demonstrated special musical promise but not necessarily having the resources for the specialist teaching and guidance required for success This thought manifested itself in his founding of the Yehudi Menuhin School, and subsequently extending into this fantastic, new venue.

All wonderful stuff.

His endorsement of the young players coming through his school helped launch many international careers. Bobby Chen the pianist last night, he benefited from the professional support of Yehudi Menuhin who toured with the young artist.

It is a reflection of Menuhin's close understanding of the profession, or the business itself, set against the changes and chances of fortune; the experience of most within it. With Salieri's scripted mantra in the opening sequence of the film 'Amadeus' raising a wry smile in many instances.

Menuhin recognised that he personally could effect a change for the better within the world.

Add to that a personal willingness to do so, and there was change. Or, Game On! as Nigel Kennedy might retort colloquially, the great contemporary violinist and performer, media personality, football fanatic, Aston Villa supporter, and another protégée of the great man.

As a former genius child prodigy Yehudi Menuhin was well placed to offer this counsel, and his kindness and humanity has assisted so many.

We have so much to thank him for still even though his passing away just at the beginning of the new millennium left the new century itself bereft of his living personality.

The hall invites us to continue to reflect, and perhaps continue to learn from his philosophical statements and the example of his relationships within humanity in our own changing and uncertain world.

The Concert with Kenneth Woods and Bobby Chen Piano--

The American conductor Kenneth Woods offers a mature and thoughtful reading of another giant in music, namely Mozart.

Without baton, Kenneth Woods opened the evening with the Don Giovanni sequences for woodwind ensemble.

Assembled in front of the podium were a selection of musicians from the Surrey Mozart Players, a great little band well led and making good sounds. Without set, costume, wigs or Proscenium, we were propelled into a condensed version of the adventures of the controversial figure Don Giovanni.

Maestro Woods reflected in a few words the significance of the Don and the impact the opera had on Mozart's life as he wrestled with his political leanings, whilst so dependant on the very society he was questioning to support his wife and a growing family. Woods described a life and professional existence not so unfamiliar to the experience of many working musicians of today.

Moving to the Concerto played on a magnificent Fazioli piano highly recommended by Chen, there was a sublime combination of skills of the conductor Maestro Woods and the Pianist Bobby Chen as the three movements evolved. Kenneth Woods kept a tight control over the tempo but allowing the pianist to dazzle and the orchestra to shine.

Again preceded by a short explanatory introduction by Kenneth Woods, relaxed and informative, taking us into a world where Mozart lived and breathed and where wonderful artists such as Chen and Woods demonstrate that these works of genius are in safe hands.

As a footnote to the Haydn work which was played after the interval... Maestro Woods said, in his unbiased opinion-

.....'It rocked.....' as he dashed off to his next engagement across the borders to Glasgow this week.

This reviewer couldn't agree more