

From the Surrey Advertiser  
July 9, 2010

**Ambitious programme draws Surrey Mozart Players' season to a close.**

The Surrey Mozart Players concluded their 2009/10 season and their run of Schumann's orchestral works with a most ambitious programme in the Electric Theatre.

Under their charismatic conductor Kenneth Woods, they gave an inspired performance of one of Schumann's finest works for orchestra, his *Manfred Overture*. The composer, mentally disturbed himself, was ideally placed to portray Byron's tragic hero.

The performance was deliberately nervy and fevered, with plenty of dramatic tension, and the frenetic string playing contrasted sharply with the chorale-like wind chords towards the end.

Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, written in the wake of his disastrous marriage, is so difficult that Leopold Auer pronounced it unplayable, even if it has now become very popular.

Its difficulties were exquisitely surmounted by the young Russian-born violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky, who throughout produced a wonderful, warm tone from his eighteenth-century instrument.

If the long first movement and its astonishing cadenza were technically proficient, the central Canzonetta, with its touching main theme, took off emotionally, with some lovely duetting between soloist and the wind instruments.

The Finale, full of Russian folk-like themes, was driven forward with a thrilling sense of momentum.

The soloist galvanized the orchestra into their best playing of the evening, while his own part reached to the very top registers of the violin, and he drew a tremendous ovation from the audience.

Notwithstanding the dry and "toppy" acoustic of the Electric Theatre, the orchestra exuded warmth in their rendering of Brahms' Fourth Symphony.

Described by Kenneth Woods as one of the few "tragic" symphonies in the repertoire, it is full of good tunes and fascinating harmonies, particularly in the modally inflected Andante. The descending motives of the opening, echoed near the end of the great passacaglia Finale were beautifully shaped. The bumptious Scherzo movement, with its jolly interjections from the triangle was fluent, yet exciting.

The Finale itself was imbued with some lovely phrasing, a careful pointing out of the contrapuntal niceties, and, after some effective tension and release in dynamics, concluded with a great climax.

*Shelagh Goodwin*