

For the Surrey Advertiser-

March 9, 2009

Mozart Players Dazzle Menuhin Hall Audience-

The **Surrey Mozart Players** concert under the leadership of their conductor, Kenneth Woods, at the Yehudi Menuhin Hall on Saturday 7 March produced another feather in their cap.

The opening overture to "La Clemenza di Tito" (sorry, but "The Clemency of Titus" of the programme just doesn't have the same ring) was aptly arresting, this performance well-suited to that occasion of official celebration for which it was written.

There were two early works by two very different composers, both displaying the optimism of their youth. The first of these was the Horn Concerto no.1 in E flat by Richard Strauss, the solo horn admirably interpreted by Phillip Eastop who produced some purring *piano* passages and, by contrast, suitably declarative tones leaving no doubt as to his technical ability and musical interpretation. The small orchestra sounded double its size in the climactic *forte* passages, there were some very well-balanced dialogues between the *tutti* and the horn, and a beautifully executed *cantabile* section from the bass strings in the *Andante* taking up the haunting horn melody. The *diminuendo-ritenuto* passage towards the end was perfectly pregnant, leading to a lively ending; and the ending of an all-too-short first half (only 25 minutes' worth of music!)

The second half of the concert began with a "Harmonie" for wind octet, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 horns and 2 bassoons, of an arrangement of "pops" from "Le Nozze di Figaro" (The Marriage of Figaro) by Johann Nepomuk Wendt. It may not generally be known that in mid-18th century Europe, societies of noblemen required some light music to accompany their meals, parties and social gatherings to which ends the "Harmonie" was created to play transcriptions of the popular operas of the day. Even Mozart made such a transcription of one of his own operas.

This provides a golden opportunity for the above-mentioned players to display their abilities and talents. The SMP soloists displayed some nicely- pointed dialogues, most particularly in the last movement of the arrangements. However, such arrangements are not an improvement on the original score for voices, which it is difficult to better.

The concert ended with the young Beethoven's symphony no. 1 in C. The execution of this work was a triumph, well articulated, vigorous and controlled. It was tempting to break into applause after the first movement. Strong dynamic contrasts, steady, harmonious woodwind, brass and string combinations and delicate phrasing featured in the *Andante*. The *Minuet* was successfully *Allegro molto e vivace* and the last movement was impressive, the dynamics, intonation, unison playing and other details, all a pleasure to listen to. Congratulations to the violins and the brass sections in this last movement for their excellent coordination.

I felt this work very well suited to the SMP and enjoyed the levels of perfection they attained.

--Margaret Morley for the Surrey Advertiser