

S t. Mary's Hemel Hempstead

Lunchtime Concert

Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Last century saw repeated attempts by the musical world to marry the classical tradition with the new jazz idiom – never entirely successful although efforts continue to be made to the present day. Some of the leading composers of the early 1900s were involved – George Gershwin, Maurice Ravel, William Walton, Kurt Weill, Eric Coates. All flirted, with more or less commitment and determination, with this musical match making. The two classes of music making remain broadly compartmentalized, but the twinning exercises have produced a fine body of exciting work. George Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue' and Eric Coates' 'Saxo Rhapsody' and 'Rhythm' from the Four Centuries Suite are but three examples. But the big names don't have it all their own way and this lunchtime concert featured works by four composers less well known, perhaps, to the general public, but hugely popular and successful, with an enthusiastic following of their own. Interpreting their music we were lucky enough to enjoy the outstanding talents of David Wigram on viola and saxophone, and his piano accompanist Alexander Wells. David himself is fascinated by the jazz potential of both of his instruments, and his programme showed this:

'Like Crazy' by Aaron Minsky (AKA 'von cello') featured the viola throwing off classical constraints and, with extrovert verve, providing toe-tapping Transatlantic-style rhythm. Eduard Putz's 'Blues for Benni' exuded the dreamy, poignant essence of this mode – an American musical gift to the world and an emotional language knowing no national boundaries.

With the saxophone, which he makes speak as effectively as he does the viola, David gave us first Eugene Bozza's Aria for Alto Saxophone – no jazz element here. This piece has the strange, evanescent tones one associates with Debussy (echoes of 'Prelude a l'Apres Midi d'une Faune'?) And to end we heard Erwin Schulhoff's 'Hot Sonata' for alto saxophone and piano. This ambitious work has four movements, and the jazzy, bluesy accent of the sax does not let up for a moment. Perhaps we will never see a full marriage between classical and jazz, but in the meantime they remain good friends, and long may that continue!