

St. Mary's Hemel Hempstead

Lunchtime Concert

Tuesday 13th April 2010

There was a warm welcome for a return visit from guitarists Ian Kelleher and Sue Williams. They last played at St. Mary's one year ago almost to the day and left their audience wanting more; and we got more this time round, but as well as their polished musical artistry, they showed rare talents as entertainers, using facial expressions and body language to match their music and to project their rapport with one another. As Simon Pusey later pointed out, the guitar is a technically demanding instrument when played solo, but for performers to synchronize two or more of them perfectly is a rare achievement. A case in point was their second item, the delightful Cambridge Suite by Nikita Koshkin. A word about the composer: Koshkin, born in 1956 and of course still very active, has been obsessed with the guitar all his life and has never stopped exploring its capabilities, and even inventing new ones (although there is probably no truth in the rumour that he has been developing it as a wind instrument!) And he has brought his restless urge to experiment to bear on his own prolific musical output. Never one to take life too seriously Koshkin has included in his Suite a 'Tennis Waltz' as its second movement. Here, the rhythms invite players (and, who knows, maybe even audiences/spectators) to let their eyes follow an imaginary ball from side to side, from one end of the 'court' to the other – and this Ian and Sue did, nothing loath! And in 'Humouresque' – the fifth movement – as the music slurred (quite deliberately) they drank each other's health in white wine, their heads slowly drooping over their instruments in an alcoholic haze (but not, thank goodness, to the detriment of their playing!)

There was, of course, much else in the programme, with music from Spain (Granados, De Falla) France (Satie, Debussy) Argentina (Jorge Cardoso) and Brazil (Celso Machado), so that, inevitably, a strong Latin flavour was manifest. Brief comments on each of the other pieces performed follow:

Granados – Intermedio from Goyescas

The opera inspired by his admiration of the work of the great Spanish artist Goya consists of a series of impressions owing more to emotion than description. The 'Intermedio' (interlude) links the two halves of the opera in a dreamlike manner.

Satie – Gnossienne No. 3

This is, typically, a tiny tone poem adapted from the piano, composed with an extreme economy of means – but a finished work of art.

Debussy – 'Cakewalk', from Children's Corner Suite

This delightful piece, again transcribed from the piano, was dedicated to the composer's three-year-old daughter Claude Emma ('Chou-Chou'). The 'Golliwog's Cakewalk' is full of humour and high spirits; the opening section bounces along in rag-time, but then there are three notes from 'Tristan and Isolde', the solemn mood of which, though, is dispelled in seconds by a staccato chuckle, heralding the re-appearance of the golliwogs.

De Falla – 'Danza Del Molinero' from 'The Three Cornered Hat,'

In this ballet the composer succeeds in infusing an intense and colourful Spanish idiom into his rich, full orchestration. The music is perfectly transposed for two guitars – a joy to play for Ian and Sue.

Jorge Cardoso – ‘Milonga’

It is not the first time that medical and science qualifications seem to release a flow of musical creativity in their holders. Borodin was a prime example – indeed his scientific work came first with him. It would be difficult to say the same of Jorge Cardoso, an Argentinian doctor. This gentle, lyrical piece would suggest that music is at least as important for him!

Celso Machado - ‘Xaranga De Vovo’

A versatile musician – guitarist, percussionist, etc. – Machado performs widely both in his native Brazil and abroad. This lively piece is typical of his style – full of *joie de vivre*, but with a distinctively Latin American flavour.

We are, of course, in Simon Pusey’s debt for arranging these excellent lunchtime recitals; but this accomplished musician does it himself! The next concert, on Tuesday May 11, will feature Simon as tenor, a role he has frequently filled with great distinction. He will be accompanied on the piano by Anna Le Hair – can it get any better!