

St. Mary's Hemel Hempstead

Lunchtime Concert

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Nicholas Breakspear, a native of Abbots Langley, was the first (and only) English pope and his papacy was nothing if not turbulent. The Breakspear trio, formed nine hundred years later, could also be regarded as record breaking in its unusual combination of soprano, piano and French Horn and, while not having a 'turbulent' career since its inception, has certainly been making waves musically. The group's programme at St. Mary's on 8<sup>th</sup> June was striking in its contrasting choice of items, and its open and versatile approach to music making was further evidenced by the addition of Suzannah Hart (clarinet) and Tina Gibbons (soprano). Combine these with the talents of Anita and Tony Catterick and Anna le Hair and you have a heady mixture indeed.

Any German composer active in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have to face formidable competition; names such as Wagner, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Schumann, to mention but a few might, one would suppose, be enough to cause them to tear up their manuscript paper in despair. Nothing daunted Carl Gotze composed much, but we may be allowed to regard 'Still as the Night' as a gem of romantic expression. In the same vein but in a different time and place we had 'The Water of Tyne' by the living English composer John McCabe. Another contemporary, Julian Dawes, combined humour and melody with 'a Splash of Blue' and 'Limericks from Lear'. To alternate these pieces with Schubert's passionate 'Shepherd on the Rock' was imaginative programming indeed.

A sombre but beautiful note was struck by two of the remaining pieces – Cherubini's 'Ave Maria' and 'Scheiden und Meiden' by Peter Cornelius. Between them we had a surprise package from Shostakovich, a composer widely known for the emotional intensity of most of his music – and what did we get? 'Waltz', from the Jazz Suite, with a decidedly modern, light-hearted feel to it, suggesting that inside the grave exterior is a fun-lover just waiting to get out. Finally, the 'Flower Song' from 'Lakme' by Delibes must be a universal favourite. In this Anita was joined by Tina for a delicious duet – a perfect match for two sopranos exotically intertwining then fading into the distance.

It says much for the standard set by these lunchtime concerts that performers immediately become favourites whom Simon can readily call on for future events. He can now add the Breakspear Trio and Tina to his rich and vibrant network. Suzannah and Anna (forgive the unintentional rhyme) are already a part of it!