



Newsletter No 154

December 2006

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BGS News

It seems a long time since the Society's October meeting, but there sure has been a great deal happening in the intervening period.

In my own view it's been a very successful few weeks, and thanks are recorded in the pieces that follow where they are due - without these efforts none of it would have happened.

It's back to normal in December, the Society meeting is on the second Sunday, the 10th, starting 7.30 pm at SHP. As it's the Christmas meeting it follows the usual format for this occasion - bring along something (hopefully seasonal!) to play and some small item or food or drink to share around. It's a social as much as a musical evening, so come along and join in.

The only negative note arising from recent events was the size of the audience for Rebecca's recital, which needs to be mulled over by the Committee. Despite that I found the recital highly enjoyable, but without more ado we need to move on and my thanks go to "Cyclops" for the following review of Rebecca's performance....

Gavin Smith

Rebecca Baulch recital, 29 October 2006

It might have been because we were enjoying unusually balmy and sunny weather, but there was a disappointingly low turnout for our afternoon concert on 29 October given by Rebecca Baulch. This was a pity, for Rebecca has much to offer. Her playing was secure; she didn't over-reach herself technically; and she unfailingly produced a good sound from her instrument. Above all, she was a model of how to play notes cleanly and clearly without fuss or histrionics of any kind.

Overall, however, her playing, while nicely polished and crafted, failed to involve me as much as I would have liked. At the end of the concert, I felt like a visitor to an art gallery who'd had his fill of pretty pictures and longed to turn the corner and find something to make him really think - such as a few Picassos, or even a pickled sheep! In short, I feel that Rebecca needs to concentrate on making more of an impact by developing a greater range and quality of sound - and by selecting repertoire to show off the full range of the qualities that can be coaxed from the guitar. I am reminded of a remark by the well-known and dynamic American guitarist Elliot Fisk who said that sometimes you needed (metaphorically) to grab the guitar by the scruff of the neck and give it a good shake - which he does to excess on occasions! However, when it comes off, the effect can be electrifying. So I would urge Rebecca to be bolder in moving her right hand occasionally to the right of the hole (not once did I see her do so) where the sound is stronger and clearer, and developing a greater dynamic range beyond merely mf to p.

Turning to the programme, Rebecca began with Lachrimae (also known as the song "Flow my tears"). This was rather a low-key beginning and a difficult

place in the recital to develop the necessary sense of sorrow and intensity suggested by the title. However, it was cleanly played, as was the following Galliard although it didn't offer sufficient contrast in pace to the Lachrimae.

Next came the Suite in E minor by Bach. Curiously, the programme failed to identify the suite or the arranger (and where were the Courante and Bourrée?), although Rebecca announced the title beforehand. If only extracts from a suite are to be played, then I think the programme should say so. It sounded as if she was playing the Bream 1967 transcription – but there has been a lot of research into the performance of this kind of music in the intervening period, and I would have liked more ornamentation – especially in the repeats. In terms of the performance, the Presto didn't come close to the pace required. It's a difficult passage to play; but the audience needs to feel that the performer is living dangerously at this point so that a successful conclusion is all the more dramatic and triumphant. The Sarabande lacked depth and grandeur because the right hand fingers simply didn't connect positively enough with the strings; and more ornamentation and variety of tone was needed do it justice. On the other hand, the



gigue was played well, and at an acceptable tempo.

In Pavana and Maria, Tarrega showed how he had the ability to concentrate the psychological message he wanted to get across in just a few bars; and Rebecca conveyed, in particular, the wistful nature of Maria (a gavotte, and named after the composer's wife) rather well.

After the interval, we heard Five Minuets by Fernando Sor. No surprises in these very familiar pieces. Well played, but more could have been made of them.

There followed 5 Miniatures by Bela Bartok. Rebecca said that they were originally written as part of a larger set of piano pieces for children. Bartok had spent much time during the early 20th century engaged in extensive research into

the indigenous music of many cultures, and this activity had a strong influence on his compositions. But anyone familiar with the famous Bartok pizzicato – and, in particular, some of his more energetic works (such as the Fourth String Quartet) –

might have been pleasantly surprised by the gentle and melodious nature of the Miniatures. Rebecca said she had included them because just the day before she had been asked to perform them elsewhere. But, in terms of technical standard, it has to be said that they were closer to student, rather than recital level.

The final item on the programme was a set of Four Spirituals by the British composer Ned Bennett. Ned is apparently quite a prolific jazz-oriented composer, and it was possible from time to time to hear parts of the original tunes through the intricate jazzy textures. Rebecca said the music was in fact based entirely on tonal harmony; but that the interesting and unusual harmonies arose because of the absence of the root of the chord. Anyway, the effect was quite pleasing, and I would be happy to hear the pieces again. It would have been a good idea if, before each piece, we could have heard a short extract from the original tune to help us recognise fragments of it when they appeared in the arrangement.

As an encore, we heard the tongue-in-cheek "Gran Vals" by Tarrega (which has achieved unknowing status in the modern world thanks to the use made of it by a certain mobile phone company).

We would be very pleased to welcome Rebecca back to the Society on a return visit; but next time I hope she would present more varied material, and in a more robust way. She needs to draw us into a greater sense of involvement with the music – and I'm sure she's more than capable of doing so.

Cyclops

Student Concert Sunday 5th November

We may have had some initial doubts about arranging our Student Concert on bonfire day, but we needn't have worried as the superior attraction of the fireworks in the SHP Recital Room made sure of the success of our event.

It was a while before the start of the concert when it became clear that lack of an audience was not going to be a problem – indeed, any difficulties were going to be in the other direction as close on 100 people just about squeezed into the Recital Room pretty much on schedule for our 2.30 start.

The music got under way with an instantly recognisable rendition of the Beatles A Little Help from my Friends, which was much appreciated by the

audience, from Debbie Haeck's Banditos guitar ensemble (the members of this group all being of primary school age).

17 soloists who were Debbie's students and 2 who were from other teachers in the area followed the Banditos. I didn't manage to get down what they all played but they did wonderfully well with their solos - I know I would have been terrified at that age to be playing solo in front of such a large audience.

After an interval the older students had their turn as the second half of the concert got under way in light-hearted mode with John Winters and Lewis Young taking the stage and producing from behind their backs 2 Ukuleles and entertaining us with 'Wipeout'. These were then replaced by their usual instruments, with which John and Lewis played us the Shadows' Telstar, followed by solos from both John and Lewis, and then solos from Xiangyu Hu, Matthew Paterson, and Caspar Algar.

The floor was then re-arranged to accommodate the Berkshire Youth Guitar Ensemble, whose 7 members played us three pieces in splendid style. The members of the group were then further augmented to form the County Orchestra under the baton of Colin Arenstein. The professionalism of these youngsters was demonstrated by the way they dealt with one of those dreaded moments - a collapsing music stand.



The County Ensemble in full flow (above) and (below, the County Orchestra with Colin Arenstein conducting.



Both groups sounded excellent throughout, clearly the result of much practice and dedication by the players and their teachers.

It remained to present the soloists with their certificates to mark the occasion, and each one thoroughly deserved the round of applause they received.

It takes a great deal of effort to organise a successful event such as this, and our thanks are due to Debbie Haeck in particular, but also to Steve Christmas and Colin Arenstein, and all the players who turned out on a Sunday afternoon to entertain us. A special mention is due to Dave Stinchcombe of DS Classical Guitars for sponsoring the event and providing the performers certificates.

Lastly thanks are due to the audience (young and not so young) who listened attentively and showed their appreciation throughout, and also contributed generously as they departed to my donations tin.

Gavin Smith

November meeting

It must be a year or so since we were first introduced to the 3 short pieces on Berkshire themes by Ivan Andrews, specially written for the BGS. Thus it was that we eagerly looked forward to Ivan's visit to the Society on Sunday November 19th and the opportunity to play these pieces under the composer's direction.

We had an excellent turn out for this occasion, and Ivan did not waste any time as we got to grips firstly with "Big House in Windsor". It was good to

hear Ivan's views on how the piece should be played, particularly with regard to dynamics and other aspects that with the best will in the world we were going to struggle with a bit on our own. It did not take us long to reach a quality of performance adequate to be recorded, and somewhat amazingly we made it through the piece in good order.

We then tackled the very laid back "On the River", and after the interval the much more lively "South Hill Park" and hopefully in the latter piece we managed to convey Ivan's desire to represent the myriad of activities that take place at the Centre. Again, we benefitted greatly from Ivan's advice and encouragement throughout.

Each of the three pieces were captured for posterity both on Ivan's camcorder and Gary Jordan's minidisc. At the time of writing I don't know what arrangements are being made to enable us to hear these recordings but no doubt all will become clear in due course.



The players who gave "Berkshire Themes" such a good go - from left to right, John Parr, Cheryl Slater, Guy Anderton, George Macdonald, Ivan Andrews (composer and maestro), Gavin Smith (seated), Dave Stinchcombe, Steve Tucker, Allan du Feu (seated) Debbie Haeck, Gary Jordan, Steve Christmas and Richard Butters.

At the very end of the evening an ensemble of Gary Jordan, Debbie Haeck, Steve Christmas and Dave Stinchcombe played us "Maris Piper Mash", Ivan's winning entry in our composition competition a couple of years back, and which provided a suitably stomping finale to the evening.

Now for some additional background. The BGS was founded by Ivan Andrews in 1977, (surely our 30th anniversary must be worth celebrating in some way?), and we still have 2 founder members playing regularly - Gary Jordan and Richard Butters. We were also pleased on the night to be able to meet Roger Green, who took over

the chair of the Society upon Ivan's departure for the West Country (Roger took the picture above, so missed out on the evidence of his presence being recorded).

Last but by no means least we were also pleased to be joined by Jack Rymill, who finds that age inhibits his playing but wishes to stay in touch with the classical guitar world, and also Michael Hickey, a past member thinking of rejoining our ranks. We hope to see you both again.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable evening which lived up to the hopes invested in it in advance. Thanks to all the players, to Gary Jordan for preparing us over the last year or so, and especially to Ivan for the time spent in composing the music and in making the long trip to Berkshire. We hope to meet up with you again.

Gavin Smith