

Music



Alison Stephens / Steven Devine in Plymouth (review)

22nd February 2008

If you used your Ferrari only to drive the kids to school, or thought a mandolin was something to accompany a second-rate tenor with at some Neapolitan bash, you'd surely be missing the point of what these two great bits of Italianism are all about!

Beethoven's two early sonatinas are certainly nicely written and most pleasing on the ear. Likewise, Hummel's Grande Sonata is effectively crafted for the main protagonist, in this case the piano, and here most ably despatched by Steven Devine, while Alison Stephens' mandolin embellishes with scales, arpeggios, and even gets the odd scrap of melody of its own.

But, it was in Raffaele Calace's Concerto No 1, that the Sherwell United Church audience really saw what the mandolin is capable of.

Rather like any top racing driver, Stephens just opened the throttle, to reveal an instrument which is more than capable of holding its own in any full-blooded Romantic concerto.

The mandolin writing is fiendish, and one reason for the composer's relative obscurity must simply be that there are few players with such consummate skill to do it justice.

It's a real tour de force, demonstrating virtually every contemporary playing technique imaginable, while cast in some most inventive harmonic shades.

To be privileged to enjoy this virtuosity, given so unassumingly and with such all-embracing musicality, made this a truly outstanding lunchtime recital for all those present.

PHILIP R BUTTALL

