

Music



REVIEW: Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment with Elin Manahan Thomas

29th May 2011

The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment describes itself as the UK's leading period instrument ensemble, quite a proud boast in an area where there is some serious competition.

But within a few bars of starting their all-Handel programme, in the glorious acoustic of a packed Great Hall, Dartington, it was immediately apparent that this description was fully deserved, such was the calibre of the playing from every member.

Of course, great individuals don't necessarily add up to a great ensemble, but here the truly inspired leadership from Alison Bury, herself a superb violinist, ensured that each and every note was perfectly formed, while maintaining an impeccable ensemble throughout, with historically-informed ornamentation that was subtle yet never overly intrusive. But even more than this, there was a tremendous sense of fun and enjoyment which permeated the performance, whether in the slickly-despatched fast movements, or the expressively-shaped slow ones.

But there was a far greater delight in store, in the shape of soprano, Elin Manahan Thomas, who, in her three opera arias and a less-commonly heard motet, *Silte venti*, simply won over the entire audience, not only with her totally flawless coloratura, her gloriously well-rounded tone, but most of all in her sense of simple, yet utterly sincere communication with her listeners – here was a supreme artist who surely deserves to reach the very pinnacle of her profession.

PHILIP R BUTTALL

