

Music



Philip R Buttall's Review Of The Classical Year 2008 (exclusive)

22nd December 2008

Despite all the economic doom and gloom, 2008 has still been a good year for classical music.

Plymouth is lucky to have a number of music societies and concert series around, which regularly cater for specific tastes and interests.

Here Plymouth Chamber Music Trust is arguably one of the best of its kind in the country, regularly attracts all the top London artists, and has certainly lived up to its accolade of 'the Wigmore Hall Experience without the hassle'.

There have been some memorable highlights this year, from the stunning performance by the Fujita Piano Trio, to a magnificent recital by young violinist, Ruth Rogers.

The music society at Tavistock's Kelly College has also continued to attract excellent performers, as has the Totnes Early Music Society, in its own unique specialism.

Meanwhile, the series of lunchtime concerts at Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery is now back on home ground again, after a temporary move across the road during the Museum's refurbishment.

An undoubted highlight here was the superb recital by South Korean violinist, Sulki Yu, *pictured left*.

Plymouth Philharmonic Choir has been busy, with its usual three concerts, and even managed to squeeze in an extra performance of Messiah, due to public demand.

While the choir is best known for its performances of large-scale works like Bach's St Matthew Passion, its special anniversary concert in the RC Cathedral in the summer was a welcome departure, where the emphasis was on shorter and lighter works.

Riding tandem with the Philharmonic is the University of Plymouth Choral Society, which also presented three varied and enjoyable concerts during the year.

Plymouth Symphony Orchestra gave its three regular concerts, where it was fortunate to enlist the services of two top players as concerto soloists, violinist Tasmin Little, and pianist, Megumi Fujita, while Maggie Faultless and Devon Baroque seem to go from strength to strength, and are very much becoming key-players in their niche area.

The Plymouth Orchestral Concert Series 2008/9 has already brought the Philharmonia back to the Pavilions, and will feature the Bournemouth Symphony and European Union Chamber Orchestras next year.

Sadly this is the last of a three-year Arts Council funding programme, and with audiences never anywhere near maximum, it does not look too hopeful that these international outfits will return of their own volition in the short term.

But Plymouth is most fortunate to have the excellent Ten Tors Orchestra, and its forward-looking conductor, University Director of Music, Simon Ible, and their value will surely be more keenly felt over the coming years.

Opera buffs, too, have had a lot of good things to savour this year, especially with Welsh National's fine production of Verdi's Falstaff, and Glyndebourne's excellent Magic Flute and Carmen.

As for an overall winner, the quite superb reading of Sibelius's Second Symphony, by the Philharmonia, with fellow-countryman, Leif Segerstam conducting, must surely rank as one of the most memorable performances heard.

In terms of pure enjoyment though, Russell Watson, *pictured right*, at the Pavilions would be a hard act to beat.

While he was thoroughly entertaining, it was a revelation to see a packed audience able to get so totally involved too, and something which purely 'classical' events don't perhaps seek to encourage sufficiently.

PHILIP R BUTTALL



[See [below](#) for 2009 Review]

Music



Philip R Buttall's Review Of The Classical Year 2009 (feature)

21st December 2009

It has certainly been another good year for classical music in the city and surrounding area.

Plymouth Chamber Music Trust once again brought some top artists to the city, starting the year off with saxophone ensemble, Flotilla, who certainly managed to blow away any remaining festive cobwebs.

For those attuned to the more sedate sounds of strings, there were the Herold, Badke, and Maggini Quartets and, of course, the Endellions, with their special-celebration all-Haydn programme.

The Sherwell Centre's fine grand was used with great effect by the Aquinas Piano Trio, *pictured right*, and by the Frith Piano Quartet in what were two of the year's chamber music highlights.

Many patrons were disappointed to hear that PCMT was disbanding next April, at the end of its 16th season, but a recent announcement that a steering group has been set up to look into the possibility of promoting future chamber music, by University of Plymouth Director of Music, Simon Ible, who also directs Peninsula Arts, is certainly a hopeful sign.

Another series due to close next April is the International Lunchtime Series at the City Museum & Art Gallery, already in its 17th season.

This also came as a shock to its regular patrons, especially when three of this year's recitals, by Eclectical!, the Modern Guitar Trio and, most recently, top US jazz pianist, Judy Carmichael had proved so entertaining, bringing a welcome breath of fresh air to the series.

Again, there is better news on the horizon as concert organiser, Jeanie Moore, has vowed to continue, moving across the road to Sherwell United Church for the foreseeable future.

The last four events in the Plymouth Orchestral Series included an excellent performance from Lithuanian pianist, Evelina Puzaitė, with the Ten Tors Orchestra, some equally impressive cello playing

from Julian Lloyd Webber and the European Union Chamber Orchestra, and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra with soloists, Boris Giltburg and trumpeter, Alison Balsom.

There is no more funding as such, but the BSO will at least be returning to the Pavilions in March, with a programme of Movie Classics.

Plymouth Symphony Orchestra has been busy, too, and it would be hard to better soloist, Jennifer Pike's, *pictured left*, playing in Sibelius's Violin Concerto.

Devon Baroque celebrates its tenth birthday, and is emerging as a major force in music of the period.

The Ten Tors Orchestra has also put on some fine concerts, and provided the accompaniment for pianist, Ben Frith, when he gave the inaugural performance on the new grand in the Roland Levinsky Theatre.

Opera fans also had something to sing about, with three productions from Welsh National Opera, and Glyndebourne on Tour respectively.

It would be tough to pick an out-and-out winner, but WNO's Salome and Glyndebourne's recent Jenufa must surely rank among the contenders.

With Dartington a relatively short distance away, they have also hosted some outstanding events during the year, including tenor, Ian Bostridge and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, The English Concert, and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

The University of Plymouth Choral Society and Plymouth Philharmonic Choir have also been in fine voice and, if pressed for arguably the best all-round concert of 2009, the Philharmonic's special charity performance with the Orchestra of the Royal Marines in aid of Combat Stress, the opening event of the British Armed Forces Celebrations, would be a really hard one to beat.

PHILIP R BUTTALL

