

Ben Lawrence writes about Sarah-Jane Bradley's viola recitals, November 2016

It's not often that you get treated to a viola recital, let alone two in one week!

Last month, I was lucky enough to attend two recitals given by Sarah-Jane Bradley and John Lenehan, the first being at St Mary's Creative Space in Chester on the 9th November, the second in Scunthorpe on 11th November.

The programme was jam-packed full of viola delights, and I can't think of better advocates for the 'viola in recital' than Sarah-Jane and John. Sarah-Jane's sound is truly glorious, and the way she draws and colours phrases is inspiring. It was chamber music of the highest order, and a true partnership. John played so sensitively and together they engaged the audience throughout.

I loved every minute of the recital. The Rebecca Clarke Sonata was passionate and virtuosic, full of character and wit. I think the highlight for me, had to be the epic Romance by Benjamin Dale (at Chester) with thunderous piano chords, long brooding lines and such singable soaring melodies. If you haven't already, check out Sarah-Jane's new CD on Dutton.

<http://www.duttonvocalion.co.uk/proddetail.php?prod=CDLX7329>

Sarah-Jane and John ended their recital with the curiously titled encore 'Piece for Viola' by York Bowen. Sarah-Jane explained that Bowen stipulated in the score that the viola part was to be played by Bowen himself, to be accompanied by... York Bowen! Talented man! In its short two minutes, the piece packs an emotional punch. Sarah-Jane creates these long, flowing lyrical lines, and her expressive use of portamento and glowing rich tone touched everyone in the room. It was the perfect end to a perfect concert.

Hearing such beautiful music, played so wonderfully makes me question why there aren't more viola recitals. I think these music societies should be applauded, both concerts were fully attended. Thanks to Sarah-Jane Bradley and John Lenehan for venturing north, twice in one week. I think Lionel Tertis would have loved the recital and been really proud of such fine music making. It's good to know that the distinguished line of British viola playing is in good hands with these two fine musicians.

On the 11th November I was accompanied by two students from the University of Huddersfield. They have shared their thoughts below.

Tom Currie

A programme of delightfully expressive pieces by Sarah-Jane Bradley and John Lenehan, on Nov. 11th, gave us a real opportunity to indulge in the gorgeous tenor tone that Sarah-Jane produces.

It began with Bach's Sonata for Viola da Gamba in D major, which Sarah-Jane executed with effortless bow control. Unnoticeable bow changes on longer sustained notes epitomized a fluidity which she achieved throughout, even détaché passages attained this inter-note fluidity.

Explosive and with a robust vigour. Rebecca Clarke's Sonata for Viola gave a thrilling ride. The opening cadenza set us up well with the initial fanfare's power and the fast and reactive dramatic contrast led to the second iteration of the initial motif. The tremolo in the piano cadenza, so quiet, was bursting with this craving to explode. Short accented passages emerged from this texture anticipating the viola's freedom to run once more.

An audience member likened her tone to melted chocolate and red wine. This could not be more evident than in the second half, with Vaughan Williams's 'Romance' (at Scunthorpe) and Brahms'

Viola Sonata Op. 120 No 2, which were delivered poignantly. It was a great performance, the performers' musicianship really made the concert awe-inspiring.

Ryan Boherng Yeap

This is the first viola recital I have ever been to. Needless to say, I have been wooed by Sarah-Jane Bradley's technical prowess and her incredibly expressive playing.

The starting of Bach's Sonata in D for Viola Da Gamba showed off the rich tone of Sarah-Jane's playing. She and John Lenehan played the Allegro movement of the sonata with such light and airiness, which I think captures the essence of Bach.

The robust and powerful opening cadenza of Rebecca Clarke's Viola Sonata showed off the versatility of Sarah-Jane. The transition from Bach to Clarke was seamless. The demanding opening cadenza was played effortlessly, setting the scene for the sonata. John Lenehan did an incredible job partnering Sarah-Jane in this particularly challenging piece.

One of my personal favourites of the recital was the Vaughan Williams. Sarah-Jane played with such a velvety tone, which portrayed the folky and pastoral style of Vaughan Williams' writing. The Brahms was very well executed, sending everyone home humming the beautiful melodies of the sonata.

In the first half, I found the piano was a bit overwhelming at times, drowning the delicate sound of the viola, but in my opinion both instruments found a good balance in the second half of the recital. It was a very successful and enjoyable recital.

