

Hertford Symphony Orchestra

On Saturday (13th May 2017) I made my way from sunny Yorkshire all the way down to (equally sunny) Hertfordshire for a concert. I was invited by my lovely friend Katie, who plays cello in the Hertford Symphony Orchestra to hear their all English programme, *This Sceptred Isle*. It was a real treat of a programme, with string works by Elgar and Vaughan Williams and a Symphony by Malcolm Arnold. But the real jewel in the crown of this concert was the Walton Viola Concerto with Sarah-Jane Bradley as soloist.

I was lucky enough to attend the afternoon rehearsal, where all the final details were put in place. It was a fascinating process, lead by HSO Conductor, Tom Hammond. I was so excited to hear the performance in the evening.

The Orchestra played their hearts out, and should be really proud of what they achieved. It's not always easy introducing neglected music to concert audiences, but the HSO played with real passion and commitment, and we (the audience) loved every minute!

I've been fascinated with the Walton concerto since I was a teenager. It's everything a viola concerto should be. Dark, poignant and brooding, yet agile and jazzy. I was amazed by how even a piece I know so well (although I can barely play a note of it) felt so new, so fresh, and so exciting in the hands of Sarah-Jane. Her sound was radiant and filled the hall with long lyrical lines and feats of virtuosity. It was a joy to watch and hear how effortlessly Sarah-Jane made light of all the demands of the concerto. The way every phrase was sung out and nuanced. The eloquent changes of mood - those long flowing lines and dazzlingly virtuosic runs and multiple-stopped chords! Just brilliant! The orchestral writing is tough as well, but you could tell the orchestra and Tom had really worked hard at it to do it justice in performance.

I hope Sarah-Jane Bradley plans to record the Walton (check out her recordings of other British concertos on Dutton Vocalion www.duttonvocalion.co.uk).

It was such a treat to attend this concert, with such a fine soloist. I hope more orchestras will programme viola concertos in the future, and with soloists like Sarah-Jane Bradley, how can they not? I'm just penning a letter now to Dutton for a recording of the Walton. Anyone else want to add their signature?

Ben Lawrence
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