

THE 28TH INTERNATIONAL EAST ANGLIAN SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVAL JULY 2006 by Vicky Anfilogoff



Audiences relax in concert intervals at The Old School

Summer 2006 may well be remembered by many as the summer in which England lost in the run up to the world cup or Andy Murray was knocked out of Wimbledon, by others as the summer in which we really did have a wonderfully hot and sunny July. For me, however, it will be the summer that marked a truly outstanding International Summer Music Festival in Hadleigh. The brainchild of Tom McIntosh – an international conductor and concert pianist – and his wife, Miranda, senior partner in Kerseys Solicitors in Ipswich, it celebrated its 28th season this summer. This three week Festival is held in July each year in the lovely surroundings of The Old School which boasts a delightful garden – much used this summer – and a lovely, intimate concert hall which adds tremendously to the ambience of the performances. Apart from the wonderful music, each concert has a feature ranging from *Kaffee und Kuchen* on a Saturday morning immediately before the performance or Ploughman's Lunch after, to the delicious suppers served after the Wednesday and Saturday evening concerts. There is even a cream tea served after the Sunday afternoon repeat of the previous evening's concert, thus providing a perfect opportunity to chat about the performance and to renew friendships and acquaintances.

Saturday 8/Sunday 9 July

This year, of course, Mozart and Shostakovich were being honoured in view of their anniversaries and the first concert on Saturday, 8th July, featured the London City Chamber Orchestra Ensemble with

Andrew Laing, violin; Claire Constable, cello; Thomas McIntosh, piano. The concert opened with Mozart's Piano Trio G major No.2 K496, an attractive trio, whilst certainly not being Mozart at the height of his powers, nevertheless had much that is very typical of his writing.

Then came Shostakovich's Piano Trio E minor No.2, Op.67 (1944). The opening of this piece is absolutely spine tingling and begins with the cello playing a single note melodic line with a harmonic fifth producing a shimmering effect. The violin then joins in and finally the piano in the bass. The mood set is sombre, nostalgic almost ghostly, like figures coming in and out of focus in a heavy mist. It gradually becomes more defined, angry, even, in parts. The allegro was excellent and very well played followed by a largo of great poignancy and beauty with a sense of loss and sadness. The final allegretto ended the piece on a rather more positive note building to great depth before gradually decreasing both tempo and complexity to resolve into a gentle and peaceful end. Wonderful!

The final piece of the concert was Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio A minor, Op50, dedicated *à la Mémoire d'un grand artiste*, Nicholas Rubinstein. This is a romantic and broad sweep of music and unmistakably Russian in tone. The theme and variations are great fun with each instrument taking the melodic line in turn and at times all three building to great complexity with a constantly changing mood. The final variation is an elaborate piano part playing a funeral march over the strings.

This was a wonderful and very classy start to the Festival and one could only conclude that we were to have a really great three weeks ahead.



Miranda Reckitt, Administrator, and Thomas McIntosh, Artistic Director of the International East Anglian Summer Music Festival

Wednesday 12 July

The first Wednesday evening Supper Concert saw Andrew Laing, violin, and Tom McIntosh, piano opening with Beethoven's Sonata for Violin and Piano F major, Op24 No.5 *Spring*. There was just the slightest breath of a contented sigh from the audience at the opening bar of this well-known sonata! It was an inspired choice for a summer evening, very enthusiastically received and beautifully played.

Mendelssohn's Violin Sonata F major followed. This piece although composed in 1838 was not known until Yehudi Menuhin played it in 1953. This is a full sounding work in three large movements. A flourishing start by the piano leads straight into the violin entrance and there is much passing to and fro of a very playful melodic line. The andante is beautiful, nostalgic and very romantic. The final presto is shared equally between the two instruments to conclude a very satisfying piece, masterfully realised.

The concert concluded with Brahms' Sonata D minor Op.108. This has a huge and complex opening that leads on to a wistful and very romantic adagio. The third movement is short and quite delightful, *'un poco presto e con sentimento'* which description really sums it up. The final presto agitato is almost epic in its construction with big sweeps and some very fine 'together' playing. A superb evening of music and playing, very much enjoyed by the audience. *Chanson de Matin* by Elgar was played as an encore - a delightful and unexpected treat

Saturday 15 July *Kaffee und Kuchen*

The Saturday morning *Kaffee und Kuchen* concerts this year were dedicated to Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues, Op 87, played by Tom McIntosh and Holger Aston. These were divided into eight pairs on each of the three mornings, each pianist playing four each. At the mid-point of each of these concerts was a performance of one of Mozart's four-hand sonatas.

This was a wonderful series and a rare chance to hear all twenty-four of these small and exquisite pieces. Programming unusual and rarely heard repertoire is, of course, something that Tom McIntosh is renowned for in the Festival. He is dedicated and determined to allow his audiences to have the opportunity to hear both little played works and often ignored composers. He treats his audience as quite 'grown up' and provides the chance to hear 'difficult' composers and to discover that, actually, they DO write very enjoyable music that is not, in fact, so very difficult after all!

Shostakovich was originally inspired to write these pieces on hearing Bach's preludes and fugues and there are echoes of the Baroque style in this Opus. The sheer musicality of these little pieces, the moods they reflect and the styles written are a joy. The

three mornings were very well attended, the music excellently played, the audience enthusiastic, and a bonus was a short introduction which each pianist gave to the pieces they were playing.

The Mozart Four-hand Sonatas B-flat K358/186c – D major K381/123a were played by Tom and Holger on the first two mornings. These were quite delightful and great fun both to listen to and to see. It is always enjoyable watching two pianists working together at one piano and their pleasure in the piece adds an extra layer of enjoyment for the audience. This was very much the case in these sonatas and the audience very much appreciated the obvious rapport between Tom and Holger.

Saturday 15/Sunday 16 July

The second of the Saturday evening concerts proved to be a real treat and musical feast. The London City Chamber Orchestra Ensemble started the evening with Mozart's Piano Trio D minor, K442. This enjoyable piece is made up of movements 'borrowed' from other works with a very graceful and serene andante giving way to a jubilant and very jolly allegro.

John Rayson, viola, then joined them to play the Piano Quartet G minor K478. This starts with a strong opening Allegro, passionate but with an element of pathos followed by a calm and reflective Andante. The Rondo:Allegro final movement is bright and happy and led by the piano underpinned with great swells of sound from the strings. This was writing of great maturity, complexity and beauty and brilliantly performed. This is Mozart at his very best, wonderful!



Cast members of Mozart's *The Impresario*, which featured in the 28th International East Anglian Summer Music Festival

The highlight of the evening came after the interval when Tom McIntosh changed from piano to harpsichord, and directed a performance of Mozart's opera *The Impresario*, K486, sung in English. Nao Maeda, soprano; Michaela Davies, soprano; Russell Ablewhite, tenor; and Peter Grevatt, baritone, all from Opera Anglia, provided the excellent singing and bought humour to Peter Grevatt's arrangement of the original spoken dialogue.

The performers were beautifully costumed for this concert performance, with Tom McIntosh taking the (non-singing) part of the Impresario and conducting from the harpsichord. The singers all have very fine voices and performed excellently. The quartet was absolutely wonderful and made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. The Old School Concert Hall is absolutely wonderful for smaller operas and one can really 'feel' the sound coming up through the floor. This evening was the UK debut of Nao Maeda from Japan who has a lovely and unusual soprano voice. Unusual in that she can reach high E above high C, rare among sopranos. This was a really fantastic evening of music and hugely enjoyed by the audience judging by the contented conversation I heard during supper.

Wednesday 19 July

The second of the Wednesday evening Supper Concerts saw Tom McIntosh in absolutely sparkling form playing an evening of four Chopin ballades and two Prokofiev sonatas.

The Ballades (Op.23, Op.38, Op.47 and Op.52) are an excellent showcase for Chopin covering the full range of his musicality and outstanding composing abilities. Once again, by combining the four ballades in one programme one had the opportunity of appreciating the full depth and breadth of this composers range. There were certainly vast differences in the pieces and Opus 52, in particular, is an extremely difficult work and Chopin at his very best.

Prokofiev's Sonata A minor No.3 Op.28 has a fast, angry, start, then exuberant, then romantic, almost playful. At one point it becomes almost a lullaby and the audience moved in time to the music, almost hypnotised, only to be brought suddenly awake again as the music abruptly changed mood and was off at tremendous speed. All the way through this piece tempo and mood are continually altering. A fascinating and virtuoso piece beautifully played.

Prokofiev's Sonata B-flat No.3, Op.83 has a marvellous first movement, with a wonderful kaleidoscope of rhythms and tonalities, very exciting and dramatic giving way to a second movement that is more lyrical and consonant, very elegant but still with bursts of excitement, mysterious at times but totally uplifting. It ends with a Precipitato that is very insistent with exciting rhythms, a totally engaging piece of music. An encore of Chopin's Military Polonaise finished an excellent performance.

Saturday 22 July *Kaffee und Kuchen*

The second *Kaffee und Kuchen* concert continued with eight of Shostakovich's Preludes and Fugues (Nos.9 – 16) divided equally between Tom McIntosh and Holger Aston, with Mozart's Piano Sonata Four-hands D major, K381/123a completing the morning's programme. The audience were, once again, totally

appreciative of the Shostakovich and one could have heard a pin drop in the Concert Hall whilst these were being played such was the concentration and involvement. The Mozart was, as ever, beautifully played and very good fun to watch and listen to.

Saturday 22/Sunday 23 July

This evening saw the UK debut of Mr. Mark Kadin, recognized as one of the most exciting young conductors to emerge from Russia, who is currently Music Director and Principal Conductor of Krasnoyarsk Symphony Orchestra, the principal orchestra of Eastern Russia.



Mark Kadin, Russian conductor, who made his United Kingdom debut with the London City Chamber Orchestra

He opened his concert with the London City Chamber Orchestra, Andrew Laing, leader, in a performance of Alfred Schnittke's *Moz-Art à la Haydn* (1977). This promised to be a challenging and elusive work. It starts in quite dim lighting with the double bass, then the cello joins in and, gradually, the whole ensemble, each making a small sound until all are playing and the level builds up then stops very suddenly. A, perhaps, two beat pause, then all start together with a fuller sound at which point the lights are brightened. As the piece progresses one recognises different themes from Mozart pieces though not exactly as first written, quite satirical and short 'quotes'. Throughout the piece, at a sign from the conductor, players move position from one side of the Ensemble to another and thus the quality of the sound and the emphasis changes constantly. Gradually, as the piece draws to a close, the players walk out of the door, still playing until there are just three left and the music passes back to the double bass playing incredibly softly to a close. A very polished and highly enjoyable performance of what proved to be a totally engaging and beguiling piece of music.

Following this *coup de theatre*, the Ensemble were joined by Edward Maxwell, trumpet, and Thomas McIntosh, piano, for a performance of Shostakovich's Concerto for Piano, Trumpet and Strings. This has a lovely, lyrical opening to the allegro moderato with bustling, modern themes at times overlaying this – think lively street scenes, think American! This piece completely carries you along with it. The

trumpet playing was excellent with Edward Maxwell some times strident and at others obtaining a beautifully soft sound. The piano was magnificent, compulsive and insistent, driving the whole piece forward all of the time. Throughout there were wonderful changes of tempo and mood which completely bound you to the music. This was outstanding playing with an excellent rapport between the soloists, orchestra and conductor that were quite palpable. Top drawer Old School!

The final piece of the evening was Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings C major, Op.48. This was a wonderful, rich tapestry of sounds, a real masterwork of great beauty and brilliantly realised by this talented string ensemble and Mr. Kadin. This was an absolutely outstanding evening of music of the highest quality and played incredibly well. Mark Kadin clearly had the respect of all of the musicians involved.

Wednesday 26 July

Tom McIntosh has close ties with Kunitachi College in Tokyo and travels there to conduct and give master classes in piano, and on the final Wednesday evening of the Festival the Old School was pleased to welcome visiting students from the College and Nagoya. This very talented group of young people were to play a rich and varied programme including Japanese composers, Kabalevsky, and Chopin. The violinist, Yoko Yamamoto with Yasuo Imase on horn joined Tom McIntosh for Strauss' Theme and Variations and Tchaikovsky's Flower Waltz. Kazuhiro Yamawaki, a member of the music faculty, played a programme that included Schumann's Kinderszenen and Chopin's Mazurka No.13, Op.17-4. Finally Nao Maeda sang two beautiful arias by Puccini. The programme was enthusiastically received by the audience which included Penelope Black, Mayor of Hadleigh, and Rex Thake, Chairman of Babergh District Council.



Members of the visiting Japanese group from Nagoya, Japan, in the garden of The Old School

Saturday 29 July *Kaffee und Kuchen*

Saturday, 29th July was the third and last in the series of *Kaffee und Kuchen* concerts. Tom McIntosh and Holger Aston completed the Shostakovich Preludes

and Fugues cycle. This morning two guest pianists played the Mozart two movement Piano Sonata Four-hands G major, K357/500a. Spanish pianists Carlos Lama and Sofia Cabruja are internationally renowned in the four-hand repertoire and are known for their sure and brilliant technique, elegance and sensitivity, sense of style and interpretive personality.

Saturday 29/Sunday 30 July

They featured in the final Saturday evening concert playing the little known Mozart Fantasia in F minor, K608. Originally written for mechanical organ it responds very well to four-hand piano arrangement and opened an interesting and stimulating concert. It was followed by Rachmaninov's Six Piano Duets, Op.11 a piece that is scarcely ever played and, aurally, unusually beautiful.



Carlos Lama & Sofia Cabruja, four-hand piano team from Girona, Spain, who closed the 28th Festival

Between the two works Andrew Laing played possibly one of the hardest pieces in the string repertoire, Bartok's Solo Violin Sonata. The initial dissonances soon become acceptable to the ear and in the second performance on the Sunday afternoon there were cries of 'bravo' from the audience.

The second half of the concert paired Prokofiev's Solo Violin Sonata – easy, compared to the Bartok – with a piano four-hand arrangement of Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, K525, which has, over the years, become the theme song of the Festival. This was an excellent concert with which to bring the Festival to a close.

Absolutely wonderful aptly describes this year's Festival. Bold and thought provoking programming bringing exhilarating and exciting music forward in this very intimate Hall. Many people wrote expressing their appreciation of the opportunities offered here, for the innovation and conviction of Tom McIntosh when planning his programme, for the highly polished performances of difficult music, the guest artistes, the high quality and good value of the ticket prices and the general friendliness of The Old School. There is much here to enjoy and revel in, and I for one hope to be doing so for many years to come.