

# PROMS AT ST JUDE'S

## 5th year triumph

The 1997 series of Proms at St Jude's in the Suburb held from June 24 - 28 was a celebration in music of the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Hampstead Garden Suburb. The fifth season of Proms, it was a triumph, one which attracted praise from the national media, marking it out as a music festival to be taken seriously.

Home-based—it was far from homespun. An adventurous and imaginative programme had been put together with flair by its Artistic Director, Suburb resident Barry Millington.

Performers were of the highest calibre—many well known on the international circuit. But local children had their day of glory too.

Music ranged from the mediaeval to the modern; the unknown and the well known. From 12th century composers to Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

Korngold. Probably not the most familiar name to music lovers but judging by the rush to buy his CDs after the performance of two of his works, many will soon know him better. These concerts also celebrated the 100th anniversary of his birth in Vienna.

He was a musical prodigy who started composing at the age of 5. Of Jewish origin, he and his family escaped the Nazis in 1938, settling in Hollywood where he wrote orchestral scores for films as well as operas and orchestral pieces. His centenary year may well bring the recognition in this country his work richly deserves.

The Proms opened in rollicking fashion with the Covent Garden Chamber Orchestra, one of London's leading amateur chamber orchestras, with Humphrey Burton, a former Head of Music and Arts at BBC Television, as guest conductor. Dame Ethel Smyth's overture to her opera, *The Wreckers*, is better known than the opera itself. It was played with verve and style: great gusts of marvellous sound invoking the scene of a storm off the Cornish coast.

Owain Arwel Hughes, one of Britain's most respected conductors (who had studied with Sir Adrian Boult amongst others) took over conducting for the rest of the evening with the UK premier of Korngold's enchanting *Baby Serenade*, a descriptive piece in 5 movements covering the moods and

moments of a day in the life of a baby. Korngold called it 'a suite for a modern child'; the jazz influence is strong, with banjo, piano, harp and plenty of percussion as part of the orchestra. The last movement, said to be Korngold's favourite, is evocative of German folk songs sung by a now sleepy baby.

This was followed by his



Standing room only in St Jude's

Cello Concerto in C major, op.37 scored for an orchestra which included the marimba and vibraphone. A short but distinctive work; the cello part is rich, dark and powerful in which the soloist, Robert Max, excelled.

Korngold appeared again, later in the week, this time in the hands of the celebrated Chilingirian Quartet, with Andre De Groote as pianist in the Piano Quintet in E major op. 15. This was only the second UK performance—an ambitious and complex work brilliantly executed.

The Quartet's programme opened with their usual impeccable playing—Mozart's D minor String Quartet K421 contrasted Brahms A minor String Quartet in A minor, op. 51 no. 2.



Umbrella cover for concert goes returning from supper in the marquee

This recital was recorded on the spot by BBC Radio 3 for future transmission.

But back to the beginning—to Percy Grainger, whose music filled the second half of the first evening's concert. The critically acclaimed and award-winning Joyful Company of Singers (Director Peter Broadbent)

and syncopated dancing of a troupe of entertainers was crisp and explicit. While in *Feux d'Artifice* the full potential of the piano was exploited to create a sparkling picture in sound of a firework display with its glittering cascades of notes.

Chopin's Scherzo in C minor op. 37 and Ballade in A major op. 47 ended a performance with panache.

In the evening, the stage was dramatically transformed for a glamorous Cabaret Diversion presented with great professional skill by Jill Gomez with pianist John Constable. An intriguing selection of songs and piano solos by Poulenc, Satie, Zemilinsky, Weill was followed by songs by Benjamin Britten, Cole Porter and George Gershwin.

Gomez' glorious coloratura soprano effortlessly met the challenge of diverse styles with Constable's sympathetic accompaniment, while he came into his own with his solo performances.

Tintagel took over the first half of the last concert. The group Rebecca Austen-Brown (fiddle, flute and recorders), Rachel Hamilton (harp and flute), Clara Sanabras (voice and oud), Louise Strickland (recorders and symphony) presented *The Ark of Noah*, songs and dances from the 12th -14th centuries about some of the animals aboard the ark, a fitting introduction to the grand finale of the evening—Noyes *Fludde*. The only familiar name amongst the number of Italian English and French composers was Anon, but the music played on the old instruments and sung sweetly by Clara Sanabras was quaint and delightful.

It was a pity that the spoken words did not reach beyond the first few rows of the audience and that restive children, who found it difficult to tune into the music, made it hard for some in the audience to enjoy the performance as it deserved. Fortunately the songs came over clearly and delicately.

But the children came into their own with Noyes *Fludde*, Benjamin Britten's opera for children. Singers and acorts, and

the solo quintet were all professional. Bass-baritone Charles Foster was Noye, Clare Bartram (contralto) was Mrs Noye, Leonard Fenton spoke the voice of God, and Emanuel Hurwitz led the orchestral quintet. Local schoolchildren and members of the Youth Music Centre provided the orchestra and chorus.

Edward Kay (director of music at South Hampstead High School) conducted. It must have been no easy task to put it all

together, but it worked and the enthusiasm of all the performers was infectious.

Director Areta Breeze, ably assisted by Mary Lou Graham, deserves the highest praise for a most imaginative and innovative production. Effects were surprisingly simple—yards and yards of bubble wrap represented the waves of the sea and the construction of the ark was clever. Animals painted on T-shirts worn by the children going into the ark got over that problem. Appropriate balloons for the sun, moon and stars rose into the sky on cue, as did the rainbow with its endearing wonky yellow arch as some balloons decided to deflate slowly.

It was a tour de force—a fitting climax to a wonderful season of music, in which everyone involved deserves congratulations.

This season of Proms was organised by the local 1997 Proms Organising Committee and Music Aid. Proceeds go to Save the Children and the St Jude's Organ Appeal.

The sponsors, who gave generous support, were Safeway, Godfrey & Barr, HGS Residents Association, HGS Trust, Midland Bank plc, Glentree Estates, Hillside Holdings, Wilde Sapte, Brownhill Morris and West. The efficient stage management and box office was provided by Artmark.

Catering was in the hands of Elinor Edwards and friends.

Vera Segal



All safe in the end. Noye's Fludde



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