



Barry Middleton, who lives in Denman Drive, with Carolyn Pascal and organiser Rachel McPherson in St Jude's

Hampstead & Highgate Festival

The fifth Hampstead & Highgate Festival was in many ways our most ambitious yet. Certainly we took the opportunity to work closely with a number of local organisations, co-promoting events in a way that enabled us to share the financial burdens, as well as the pleasures, of the festival.

By far the most successful of such ventures was the concert given on the last night by Stephen Kovacevich & Friends at Hampstead Parish Church. The internationally celebrated pianist brought five highly talented artists of the younger generation – Clio Gould, Katharine Gowers, Lawrence Power, Gemma Rosefield and the mezzo-soprano Yvonne Howard – for a programme of Brahms and Mozart, all the artists donating their services in aid of the Burgh House Restoration Fund.

The performance of Brahms's Piano Quintet was particularly electrifying, Kovacevich galvanising his colleagues with playing of extraordinary intensity.

The opening concert, also at Hampstead Parish Church, was similarly notable. It opened with a new piece for trumpet and organ by Robin Holloway, whose 60th birthday we celebrated this year. The Canzona and Toccata was played in bravura style by the trumpet virtuoso Deborah Calland and her partner William Whitehead.

Then there was the world premiere of the Cantatina: 22 July 1832 attributed to Rossini, about which there was general agreement that the piece was of high calibre. As one Rossini expert

put it to me: "if he didn't write it, he ought to have done, and if he didn't, who did?" In Berthold Goldschmidt's grimly prophetic Final Chapters, forecasting the end of the world in July 2003 by means of chemical weapons, the excellent narrator was local actress Johanna Lonsky. The choir was that of New College, Oxford, under its director Edward Higginbottom.

Between those outer pillars of the festival, we offered a vast range of cultural events, of which the following are of particular local interest. The Britten Sinfonia under Nicholas Cleobury gave a superb concert of music by Bach, Stravinsky, Holloway and Copland in St Jude-on-the-Hill, an event enhanced by the presence in the church of some evocative sculptures by local practitioners: Martin Doherty, Patricia Barker, Lucy Geser, Alec Worster and David Waller. The exhibition of their work over two days was much appreciated by many visitors, as was the talk by Chris Miele about the Walter Starmer murals in the church.

Other events included walks, with Chris Kellerman leading one through the Suburb, taking in major architectural features, listed buildings and other views and details of particular interest. Shortly before the festival I announced that I would be relinquishing the post of artistic director. It has been an exciting and fulfilling five years and I could not have wished for a more gratifying final curtain.

BARRY MILLINGTON

High praise for the Proms at St Jude's

The annual St Jude's Proms Festival built on previous success, raising some £31,000 for Toynbee Hall and the North London Hospice – a 50 per cent increase on last year. The season was just as much an artistic as a financial triumph, with several of the events receiving high praise from the music critic of the Ham & High, David Sonin. An enormous debt of thanks is owed to the many generous sponsors and the dynamic teamwork of the multi-talented organising committee, chaired by the Vicar, Rev Alan Walker.

For the second year running, there was a jazz evening (this time on the opening night) with Stacey Kent and her group, which includes her husband Jim Tomlinson on tenor sax. Once again Stacey warmed the hearts of an enthusiastic audience with her sensitive interpretations of great standards and less familiar numbers alike.

The idea of a Saturday gala orchestral night featuring Beethoven's Choral Symphony was the brainchild of committee member and local cellist/bassist Helen Roose. There were some who said it couldn't be done. They had to eat their words. Thanks to the combined musicianship of conductor Robert Max, chorus master Will Carslake, a fine quartet of soloists, the Covent Garden Chamber Orchestra and an enthusiastic choir brought together for the occasion, the great work came across with a freshness and spontaneity which encouraged the audience to listen to it with fresh ears and invited comparison with many fully professional performances. It was preceded by a fine rendering by Zoë Solomon of Mozart's Piano Concerto No 20 in D minor (K 466), a work that seems to stray into the world of later romanticism, away from the cool classicism of Mozart's other concertos.

In Sunday night's song recital by baritone Christopher Maltman, winner of the Lieder Prize at the 1997 Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, an enthusiastic audience enjoyed a performance of exceptional artistry. Maltman, a rising star

who has been winning increasing acclaim on concert platforms and opera stages around the world, has a rare ability to communicate words through music, combining beauty of tone with impeccable diction and (in the case of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*) faultless German. Especially moving was his interpretation of Butterworth's cycle *A Shropshire Lad*, set to words by Housman which (although written in the 1890s) had a particular resonance for the generation who lived through the First World War. With a good sense of programme planning, he then put the audience in a lighter mood before the interval with three of Britten's best known folksong arrangements. The remainder of the recital was devoted to Schubert's famous cycle of love and despair, in which Maltman and his sensitive accompanist Andrew Smith shared with the audience a performance of great intimacy and feeling, rightly eschewing encores at the end.

The evening series continued on Tuesday with a recital by pianist John Lill, a long-established celebrity who needed no introduction. Renowned for his interpretations on disc and on the concert platform of the great piano masters from Haydn to Prokofiev, Lill's technical mastery and perfect control of tone, dynamics and timing reward the listener with fresh insights into such well-known works as Beethoven's *Moonlight and Waldstein Sonatas*, which made up the first half of the programme. For the second half he turned to two less familiar masterpieces of the romantic repertoire. Chopin's *Polonaise-Fantaisie* was one of the composer's last major works and offers a tantalising glimpse of the directions in which he might have moved if he had lived into his forties. Liszt's sonata, a unique work of 1853 which combines the peak of virtuosity with tremendous intellectual depth, was conceived well ahead of its time.

Wednesday evening welcomed the Fujita Piano Trio, comprising Japanese sisters Megumi, Honoka



Stacey Kent with saxophonist husband Jim Tomlinson



Proms chairman Alan Walker, right, greets the Mayor and Mayoress Cllrs Melvin Cohen and Maureen Braun with David and Joyce Littaur and John Wheeler

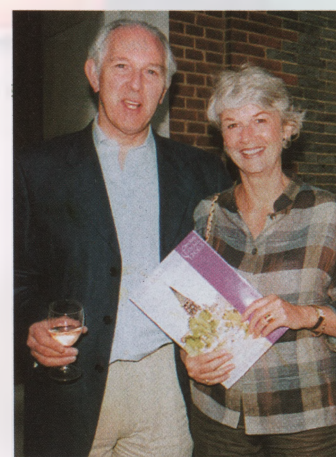
and Arisa Fujita on piano, violin and cello respectively. Their programme included delightfully spontaneous performances of Haydn's *Gypsy Rondo* Trio and Schubert's Trio in B flat – a work which alternates between tenderness and high spirits, its sunny mood concealing the dark side of the terminally ill composer's last few months. By way of contrast, the Trio gave convincing performances of two attractive modern works – the late Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu's delicately impressionistic *Between Tides* (1993) and contemporary British composer Adrian Vernon Fish's *Akunnaaq* Trio (2002). This was the première of an exciting work inspired by a visit by the composer in winter to Greenland and in particular to a cold and dangerous journey across broken sea-ice.

Thursday saw an evening of exhilarating and uplifting song

presented by the London Community Gospel Choir under their founder-director, Rev Basil Meade.

On Friday we had an evening of baroque music – cantatas and concertos by Handel and Bach performed by a talented group of young professionals led by Leo Hussain, including Suburb-born soprano Grace Davidson and friends, many of them fellow students at the Royal Academy. Grace was the star of the evening in *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten*, one of Bach's most beautiful secular cantatas, and in a solo Gloria by Handel. Instrumental works by the same composers made up the rest of the programme.

Saturday evening's show was a popular family concert given by the Barnet Youth Orchestra under its conductor David Temple. Works performed



Richard and Sally Hall



Lorna Page and Sally Lewis with a very young concertgoer.



Enthusiastic purveyors of wines to the audiences Ken Baker, Peter White and David Lewis while...

... Barbara Honeyball and Hilda Williams offered coffee

Henry Kelly, Proms patron, with Yvonne Baker



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