

Wonderful Silver Jubilee Year of Proms at St Jude's



Susie Gregson celebrates 25 years of Proms at St Jude's

What a wonderful year this was for Proms at St Jude's! As the 25th season, it was always going to be special, and thankfully it lived up to expectations.

Tosca was the opening concert, and Giselle Allen brought the role to life with her dramatic singing, ably accompanied by Carlos Fidalgo as her lover and Paul Carey Jones as the villain, who enjoyed loud boeing as well as applause as he took a bow. This is the fourth year that Nevill Holt Opera has brought its production to Proms for the first night, and it was another great success. Many thanks are due to Investec, Proms' principal sponsor, without whom this could not take place.

Another star performance was that of the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, directed by Stephen Cleobury. The acoustic of St Jude's is perfect for choral concerts, and the voices of the young choristers were enchanting. Their poise and professionalism were notable, and the full house loved every minute. "The Fauré was absolutely beautiful," said Sue Livock from Whetstone, who was attending Proms for only the second time. "It was an excellent varied programme, and it's such a lovely setting."

Highly popular in a different genre were Dan Haynes and Pete Richards, aka Bookends, the Simon

& Garfunkel tribute group. Their rendition of the duo's songs was perfect, down to the inflection that mimicked the stars' original hits. "Close your eyes and it could be them," was an apt description.

Probably the most moving moment of Proms this year was the finale of *Letters from Lony*, a new song cycle that Proms commissioned from composer Ronald Corp. This was based on correspondence sent from his grandmother in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam to Peter Lobbenberg, now a Suburb resident, then a new-born baby in England. In memory of Lony, who perished in Auschwitz, mezzo-soprano Sarah Pring left the stage singing a lullaby as the lights dimmed, leaving her and the audience in a haunting, total darkness that sent a shiver up the spine.

In complete contrast, the following evening saw audiences smiling and laughing on the Charlie Chaplin film night. Three shorts, first released 100 years ago, were screened to the live accompaniment of the Orchestra of St Paul's, playing Carl Davis's music with great aplomb.

"We really wanted a varied programme this year," said Yvonne Baker, Proms Trustee responsible for artists' bookings, and this was certainly achieved.

Adding to the rich mix were the wonderful Covent Garden

Orchestra, directed by Robert Max. In respect of their Beethoven Triple Concerto, music educationalist Joan Arnold commented: "The chemistry between the soloists and between the soloists and the orchestra was outstanding, the cello playing was technically brilliant and we enjoyed the whole performance even more than the one we heard at the BBC Proms at the Albert Hall last year with Barenboim. It was really something special."

On the final Saturday the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance demonstrated how student artists could achieve high standards in their jazz singing and playing, with a particularly strong performance by Pete Churchill's jazz choir. And on Tuesday, renowned soprano Grace Davidson showed her prowess alongside clarinettist Michael Collins and pianist Michael McHale in a programme of works by Schubert and Mozart – with her *Shepherd on the Rock* thought by many to be the finest they'd heard.

There was a tremendous range of free lunchtime events too, including a notable flute recital by the talented Marie Sato, a 17-year-old student at The Henrietta Barnett School; very talented performances by young students from The Purcell School; a beautiful harp recital

by Noelia Cotuna; and a first-rate piano recital by Daniel Lehardt.

The Schools concert was good fun, as children from a wide range of local schools displayed their talents, having honed them in workshops with Apollo5, the professional a cappella ensemble. And at the Teeny Prom, held in St Jude's Church Rooms, it was wonderful to see toddlers experiencing live music, some for the very first time.

The programme of Heritage Walks was well received, and sunshine on most days made these all the more attractive. Lester Hillman's guided tour tracing the course of the buried Fleet River sold out and he kindly offered a second helping.

The LitFest in its sixth year was a hit, and is covered in separate reports.

On top of the usual offerings, Proms added some extra treats for its Silver Jubilee. A magnificent firework display on Central Square following Tosca was a fitting tribute, garnering appropriate oohs and aahs. Then, before the jazz concert, a delicious hog roast and lamb roast was on offer, which was made all the more pleasant by the warm evening sun. It was wonderful to see Central Square come into its own in this way, as a convivial meeting place to share a bite to eat and a cold drink.



DAVID CROSSLEY

The Last Night concert featured all the traditional 'Last Night' fare, with Elgar's Land of Hope and Glory, Jerusalem and Rule Britannia giving the audience an opportunity to join in. The very first Proms concert in 1993 helped to raise funds for the St Jude's Organ Appeal and it was entirely appropriate that the magnificent Father Willis organ, now fully restored, added its thunderous voice to the evening in a superb performance of the Saints-Saens Organ Symphony in the first half.

During the interval, a grand 25th birthday cake was brought into the church, adorned with a flaming Roman Candle; pieces

of the delicious cake were offered to every member of the audience as they departed.

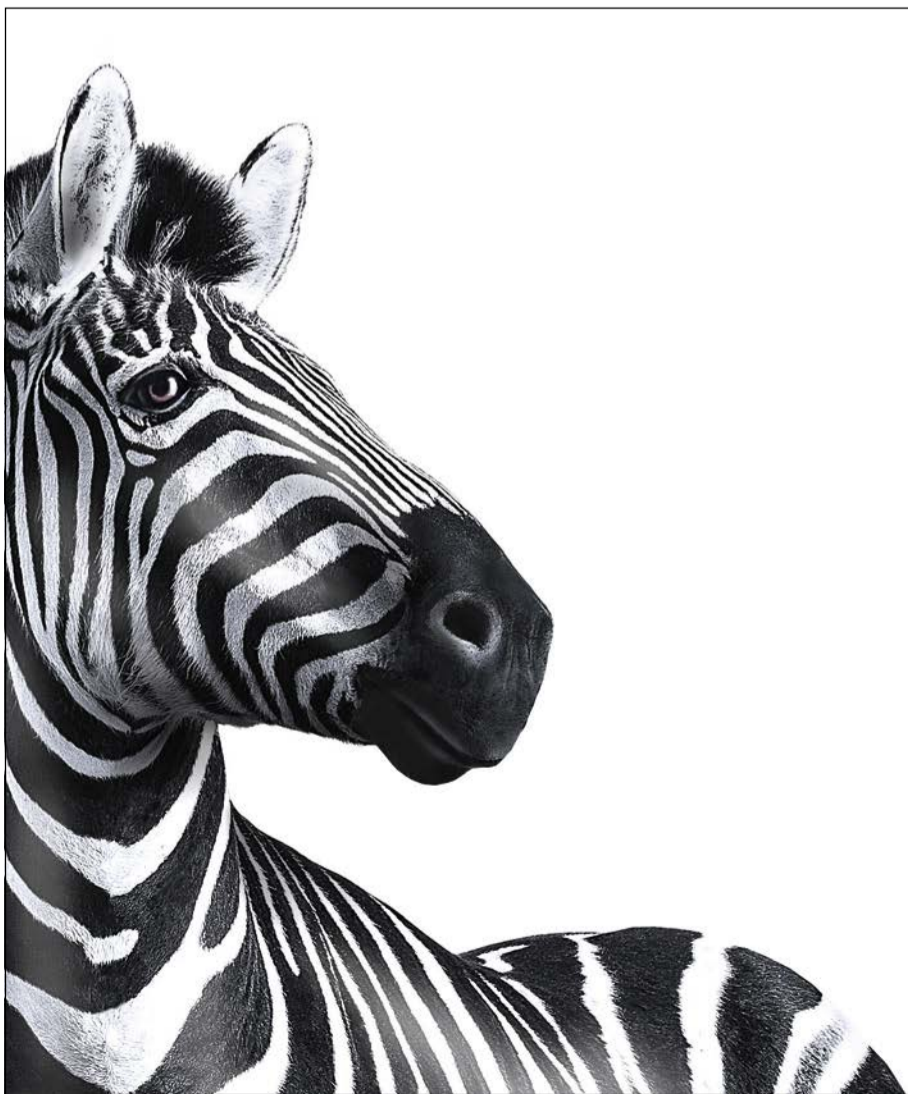
In honour of this special anniversary, Proms Chairman Richard Clegg presented a small tribute to two people critical to the festival's creation and longevity: former Chairman, John Wheeler and Proms Chief Executive, Susie Gregson.

Richard summed up the sentiments for all of us when he said of Susie: "Without her sheer determination, energy and passion, Proms would not be what it is today; it quite possibly might not be here at all. Simply put, she is Proms."

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