

Kitty Whately and Joseph Middleton

10 March 2018

If on a dark evening you should venture along to a concert at St Andrew's you can always be sure that you will be treated to an experience of outstanding music making. On Saturday evening (10 March) we had the privilege of having Kitty Whately and Joseph Middleton perform a varied programme of song.

The concert opened in stunning fashion with a powerful performance of Urbain's aria - 'Nobles seigneurs salut' - from Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots*. Then we had a shift in tone to the beautifully romantic song writing of Maurice Ravel, with a series of settings of Greek songs from the island of Chios translated into French by his friend Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi. Ravel is one of the masters of art song, and it was with these plaintive and melodic songs that he established himself as France's leading composer. In keeping with the opening sequence, the French theme was continued with Reynaldo Hahn's setting of Paul Verlaine's poem 'L'Heure exquise': here Joseph Middleton's sensitive accompaniment perfectly enhanced the mood of the deeply romantic words.

After this we were treated to settings of English poems by English composers. Firstly, we had John Ireland's 'Earth's Call', 1918 (the text being a poem by the too-much neglected Harold Monro, a friend of T. S. Eliot, and proprietor of The Poetry Bookshop). The music reflected modern rhythms, with abrupt shifts of tone and was played and sung with great energy. This was followed by Ireland's sadly lyrical 'Her Song', based on a text by Thomas Hardy; and by Herbert Howells's sensitive setting of Walter de la Mare's 'King David'. The first half of the concert was rounded off with Charles Villiers Stanford's 'La Belle Dame sans merci' – Keats's words providing the basis for the haunting rhythms of the music, and one of the highlights of the evening.

After the interval, Kitty and Joseph performed a group of songs taken from Richard Strauss first collection of songs, settings of works by the Austrian poet Hermann von Gilm - the song 'Dedication' being particularly memorable. Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) was a poet as well as a composer, and the three songs included in the programme demonstrated his command of finding the music to enhance the mood of words – settings of poems by W. B. Yeats, Edward Shanks, and the Jacobean playwright John Fletcher.

Jonathan Dove's 'Five Am'rous Songs', though the texts were taken from eighteenth century writers, was an unmistakably modern work – and the subtle humour of 'My heart still hovering round about you' was appreciated by all.

The concert concluded with works by Kurt Weill, Cole Porter and Rodgers and Hammerstein. Kurt Weill's 'My Ship' was written for the Broadway production of *Lady in the Dark* in 1941 and was very popular with the audience, as was Cole Porter's 'So in Love' from *Kiss Me Kate*. The evening ended with 'Mr Snow' from *Carousel* – a fun piece to finish with!