

Musicians from The North East of Scotland Music School

Lunchbreak Concert

Ian Wilson: recorders

Roger B. Williams: organ and piano

St Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral

Thursday 28th May 2015

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

St Andrew's Cathedral was filled to near capacity for the final Lunchbreak Concert of the current season. The Lunchbreak Series will recommence in the Salvation Army Citadel on Thursday, 24th September 2015 when the guest performers will be the Danish Quartet.

One of the principal attractions of today's concert was a welcome return visit by a local boy who has achieved great distinction both as performer and teacher throughout the wider world. As well as being Head of Woodwind at Eton College, Professor Ian Wilson is principal recorder professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and visiting recorder specialist at the North East of Scotland Music School in Aberdeen.

At one time, the recorder was ubiquitous in most schools as a teaching tool, helping to initiate youngsters into the mysteries of reading printed music. As such, it was invaluable as an educational aid but there was a downside in that it came to be regarded by some as "not a proper instrument". Those of us who have had to sit through the efforts of scores of youngsters "tootling away" on their Dolmetsch or Aulos plastic instruments would not perhaps believe that the recorder or blockflöte as the Germans call it could be capable, in the hands of an accomplished player, of the most magnificent and sophisticated musical artistry. That is exactly what we were about to hear from Ian Wilson one of the instrument's most accomplished virtuosos. In his hands, the recorder is a genuine and noble musical instrument. In fact today, Ian had brought with him five different instruments, refined modern copies of recorders from the days when first rate composers wrote specifically for the instrument. Soprano, alto or tenor, Ian had chosen the instrument most ideally suited to the various pieces he was to play. Two of the composers he had chosen for his recital had written with the recorder specifically in mind, Handel and Telemann. Four of the other pieces were composed in the days when the recorder had fallen out of fashion with composers and so Ian had borrowed music written in three of the cases at least for violin. His choice of music and of the instruments he was to use worked exceptionally well and the accompaniments played with mature artistry on piano or on the Cathedral organ by Roger Williams blended in perfectly with the various recorders. This was particularly true of the pieces by Handel and Telemann where the recorder and organ seemed to embrace one another almost lovingly.

Handel's piece was the Sonata in F Major HWV 369. In the opening slow section marked Grave, the recorder sang out almost like one of the arias from a Handel opera although the florid

ending leading into the Allegro would have defeated most singers. Here, especially in the two Allegri, the precision and clarity of Ian's playing were unbeatable.

The Sonata III by G. B. Fontana was originally for violin and on soprano recorder it sounded wonderfully sprightly. Here again Ian's pinpoint accuracy and careful phrasing shone through. Roger Williams moved to the piano to accompany Ian in the Fantasia on Greensleeves by Vaughan Williams. In this piece the recorder sounded not at all out of place and the lower instrument's rich almost Janet Baker tone made for an absolutely delectable performance. There were a host of fine things in this concert but for me the pinnacle of delight came with the Sonatina in a minor TWV 41:a4 by Telemann. I do not want to downgrade Handel but I thought that the sheer imaginative brilliance in every one of the four movements of Telemann's music had Handel's beaten by a nose and of course Ian and Roger rode the music triumphantly across the musical finishing line.

For many of the audience however it was the following piece that took the prize. This was Neil Gow's Lament on the Death of his Second Wife one of the best loved of the Scots Fiddle classics. An extra attraction of this music was that two Aberdeen musicians, sadly no longer with us had been involved in this particular arrangement of the music: Ian's original recorder teacher, Douglas Haston and his school music teacher at Cults Academy, James Reith. For this piece, Ian had chosen the tenor recorder and it sounded really rather magnificent. I'm sure Neil Gow would have been both amazed and delighted to discover that his music was still being enjoyed more than two hundred years after his death.

The final piece in the official recital was the ultimate in showpieces. Vittorio Monti originally wrote his famous Czardas for violin, mandolin or piano apparently but since then I have heard it on various instruments including, rather terrifyingly, on double bass. Ian's performance on soprano recorder with Roger on piano was one of the more believable renditions and it showed Ian's sheer virtuosity on the recorder to perfection.

Thunderous applause brought forth a special encore: this was another of the Scots fiddle pieces bringing together the artistry of Neil Gow, Douglas Haston and James Reith and of course it was thoroughly appreciated by Thursday's audience.