

Skill and variety from Willow Trio



A critique by Philip Bowden-Smith of a concert given by the Willow Trio in the Lochgilphead Parish Church and presented by the Mid Argyll Arts Association (MAAA) on Tuesday 5th April.

I think I should start this critique by saying that my little knowledge of the harp family (chordophones) is solely restricted to it's use in the classical repertoire where its gentle soothing sweetness is used to great effect, but my knowledge of the clarsach is zero.

Whilst I marvel at how anyone can cope with the complexity of the harp it would not be, for me, a solo instrument of choice.

In fact, the ancient concept of the "life hereafter" sitting on a cloud to the constant sound of the harp fills me with dread – a sort of "Hell in Heaven"! However, this presupposes that I would be allowed in in the first place . . .

So, it may come as no surprise that, when asked to write this critique, I agreed to it with some trepidation as it involved not one but three clarsachs and in a genre with which I

am unfamiliar. However, my concerns turned out to be largely unfounded.

The first thing to mention was the high quality of the Willow Trio's ensemble playing which was exemplary with each player feeding off the others.

The second which fascinated and amazed me, was their technical skill, with their endless flicking of levers to enable the full chromatic range of the instruments, something which is more easily enabled on the classical harp by the use of pedals; their accuracy and speed was truly astonishing.

As to the repertoire for this concert, the first half was principally given over to arrangements of Scottish folk songs, some conveying the sorrow of loss.

Of the others I particularly liked the slightly funky "What care I for the Minister" and Romy Wymer's catchy "Oystercatchers".

The second half of the concert was more varied and started with an

attractive arrangement of Debussy's "La fille aux cheveux de lin".

Among the other pieces, Sam MacAdam's "Golden Toad" and her "Miss Mollie Moo" stood out. I also really liked Romy's "Mysterious Garden" the opening of which reminded me of Ravel's "Fairy Garden" from his Mother Goose Suite.

As an encore we were treated to their charming arrangement of the Spanish dance from Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake; this is an ongoing project which we look forward to hearing/ seeing in future.

So, all in all this talented Trio gave the MAAA audience a skilful, varied and enjoyable evening's entertainment even if, for me, the concert lacked variety in emotional content and intensity of the Classics and Romantics which happen to be my bread and butter mainstay. However, to be clear, this was not due to the performers but more to my perceived limitations of the instruments concerned and probable ignorance of the genre.