

Mid Argyll Arts Association's Concert given by the Broen Ensemble in Lochgilphead Parish Church on Friday 25th Nov. 2022. Philip Bowden Smith

Broen Ensemble delights arts crowd

This concert by the Broen Ensemble was originally planned for 2020 but cancelled due to Covid. However, its "resurrection" came as a powerful reminder of the importance of live chamber music and its ability to arouse the deepest emotions and, in this instance, helped by the clever choice of programme which centred on the music of Vienna from late Mozart to the two late Romantics of the early 20th century, Webern and Schoenberg and, lastly, Brahms.

What makes a memorable Chamber Music performance ? Obviously, great music for starters, but, more importantly, the ability of the performers to a) speak with one voice, b) to also speak as individuals and engage in "conversations" amongst themselves and c) to be enjoying the communication experience and engaging with their audience. In all departments I felt the ensemble were exemplary; indeed, I felt deeply envious as they all seemed to be enjoying themselves so much !

Their programme started with Mozart's late Adagio and Fugue in C min. K 546 for string quartet. This was perhaps a tough opener for some as it -particularly the Fugue- is a very complex and dark contrapuntal composition, but it was delivered with authority throughout.

Next came Schoenberg's "Verklarte Nacht" or "Transfigured Night". This early work, written very much in the late Romantic style, tells the story of a tormented "fallen" woman who meets up with a man who is prepared to accept her child to be and they walk off into the starlit night hand in hand. Whilst more often heard in the composer's full orchestral version, this original version for sextet lends a certain intimacy to this highly charged and emotional piece of story-telling; it was a story well told.

Post interval we heard Anton Webern's single movement "Langsamer Satz". This, one of the few pieces he wrote before renouncing tonality, is for quartet and was maybe intended as part of a larger work. Again, a highly romantic piece full of lush harmonies and played with great feeling.

The final programmed piece was Brahms's 2nd String Sextet. Although a relatively early work it has all the hallmarks of the Master with its clearly defined structure, subtle part-writing and great tunes. The "conversations" between the players clearly demonstrated the joy of performing this beautiful piece which, in turn, lent so much to the audience's enjoyment.

Not content with the above we were then given a sparkling rendition of "Peat Dance" from the Danish String Quartet's "Wood Works" as an encore. This was a fun arrangement of Scandinavian folk music and left everyone in good humour for their homeward journey.

All in all this was an evening of quality musicianship and, for me, one of the best concerts the MAAA has offered. We wish the Broen Ensemble all the best for their future."

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