

Piano and More...

I thought I would treat myself to a restful and enjoyable Sunday afternoon by attending the Icknield Ensemble concert at St Peter & St Paul's, whilst Carrie, my lady wife, was out marching about the countryside looking for 'large sticks'.

Anyway I had just sat down and thought I would let Carrie know where I was, so I sent a text 'at concert' to which the IMMEDIATE response was 'Annette wants write-up and pics!' So here I am.

I have a wonderful sense of anticipation, hearing the orchestra or in this case the very respectable number of ensemble players tune their instruments, whilst there is the gentle hum of conversation from the substantial audience. Then there is that moment when the conductor, Leon Bosch, walks out centre stage to an eruption of enthusiastic applause – Game on.

The deathly silence that follows has one holding one's breath, and with a majestic flourish Leon Bosch takes command and the performance begins. The first part was a set of Variations on a Theme by Tchaikovsky, Op 35a by Anton Arensky. As soon as the first bow met the strings my shoulders went down: you know, that lovely Aaagh! moment when you feel relaxation taking

over. A wonderful both lilting and at the same time uplifting performance, Arwen Newband leading the orchestra, with the six other violins and the three violas, three cellos and a double bass forming a bedrock of beautiful complementary support.

The Variations I to VII were met with very enthusiastic applause with the conductor presenting Arwen and the ensemble twice before proceeding on to the next piece.

Tchaikovsky's Variations was the Star Act. As I understand it, the Variations on a Rococo Theme were originally not played as Tchaikovsky wished and in fact has stayed that way until now. This was the first airing of a score done especially for Leon Bosch where the Variations are played in the manner written. What followed was astounding. But first the introduction of Helen Godbolt the cellist and soloist for the next piece. She is based in Tring, like Leon Bosch, and they both received resounding applause.

The ensemble were spot on together under the eye of Leon Bosch and opened with a soft melody as an introduction for Helen Godbolt. Wow! When she played it was like rich dark chocolate, silky smooth and yet reaching

into your soul. If you have ever enjoyed a sniff of a rich full red wine and felt the tingle up the back of your neck – this was Helen's playing.

This virtuoso had everyone enraptured with the ensemble equally entangled in Leon Bosch's magic, because this is exactly what the whole performance was: pure Magic.

But let's not forget the venue, this magnificent Parish Church of ours not only has beauty in appearance but in the acoustics it lends to such professional performances. I can wholeheartedly recommend the concerts at St Peter & St Paul's not only because of the quality of the musicians but the quality of the sound. And it's on our doorstep – how good is that?!

Mac Dodge, St Peter & St Paul

