Review

Music

Exciting and refreshing

The penultimate concert of the Pharos Contemporary Music festival was again a resounding success, with the first half consisting of interesting and innovative short works and the second half returning to the beginnings, as it were, of 20th century modernism. To start with, Roger Marsh's A Little Snow For Solo Voice had a fragile, ethereal quality, with the music indeed resembling falling flakes of snow. Augusta Read Thomas's ... A Circle Around The Sun... (2000) for piano trio was followed by Luciano Berio's elegiac O King (1968), composed in memory of Martin Luther King Jr. Both pieces were highly enjoyable. George Crumb's Eleven Echoes Of Autumn (1966) requires the musicians to play their instruments in unorthodox ways, as well as to whisper fragments of poetry, in order to create a variety of sound effects and moods.

Finally, John Cage's 4'33" consists only of the sounds we hear around us, with not a single note being played. The call of a cicada was heard, then some passing cars, distant music... as the audience realised nothing was going to happen, there was a discernible restlessness; but, in contrast to the work's premiere in 1952, nobody walked out.

Because of the sheer beauty of Claude Debussy's music, we sometimes forget what an innovative and ground-breaking composer he was, being at the forefront of the transition from late-Romantic music to 20th century modernism. We were treated to the first set of Fêtes Galantes, songs set to poems by Verlaine. Margarita Elia and Aaron Shorr gave a charming characterisation of these very French pieces, with her beautiful voice floating above the richly coloured and textured piano part.

The final piece of the evening was Olivier Messiaen's Quatuor Pour Le Fin Du Temps (Quarter for the end of time) (1941) for violin, cello, clarinet and piano, a 20th century chamber music master-

piece. The *Quatuor's* apocalyptic vision perhaps reflects its origins, having been composed in imprisonment during World War II. Peter Sheppart Skaerved, Bridget Macrae, Roger Heaton and Aaron Shorr gave a powerful performance from the first movement, which evokes the awakening of birds at dawn, to the last, where the ecstatic lines of the violin grew to a point of almost unbearable intensity before gently subsiding into a final peace. One doesn't have to be Catholic, or indeed religious at all, to appreciate the work's spirituality and beauty. Again, all the participating artists are to be congratulated for their brilliant and engaging performances. Well done to the Pharos Arts Foundation for continuing to evolve and introduce new programmes, always with the same high quality we have come to expect.

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