

contact

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28th May : Barber Institute of Fine Arts

(University of Birmingham)

Lunchtime Concert of works of the late 19th
and 20th Centuries given by members of the
Osiris Music Group.

This concert provided Birmingham with its first opportunity of hearing this enterprising young group from Cheltenham in concert together. Their aims were laid out by their director, Philip Lane, in the last issue of 'Contact', and include: "to promote contemporary music...together with works of neglected composers and unfamiliar works of major composers." These aims were admirably illustrated in their choice of programme which included lesser-known, and perhaps underperformed pieces by Messiaen and Stravinsky, as well as songs by Fauré and Duparc, Debussy's "Syrinx", and works by the two composers in the group, Philip Lane and Peter Lawson. The programme opened with "Valse bourgeoise" by Lord Berners, a neglected composer if ever there was one, and a figure whom the group has been attempting to revive, particularly through a special concert of his works at West Malvern on the 25th of April, unfortunately not reviewed here. (See also Philip Lane's article in this issue.)

At least two members of the group struck me as possessing remarkable talent. Felicity Lott (soprano) gave what appeared to be an admirable and accurate performance of four songs from Peter Lawson's cycle "Sitting in Farmyard Mud", and proved herself to be a really sensitive and musical singer in performances of three French songs which included Duparc's beautiful "L'invitation au voyage". She has a fine voice with a warm lower register, good intonation, and a precise diction which enables one to hear almost every word. Her voice and manner have a confidence and even a maturity that is rare in such a young singer.

Peter Lawson is obviously a musician of exceptional talent, not only as a composer but as a pianist and accompanist. He was a single-minded but sympathetic accompanist to both Felicity Lott and Simon Desorgher (who played Messiaen's "Le merle noir"), and proved himself well able to tackle more soloistic parts in the duets by Berners and Stravinsky (Three Easy Pieces) that he played with Philip Lane. The four songs from his cycle "Sitting in Farmyard Mud" (which won the Royal Philharmonic Society prize for composition last year) are among the finest pieces I have heard by anyone under thirty. The solo line is beautifully phrased and structured, eminently vocal, and with a touch of Ives about it. The underlying piano part was equally true to the character of the instrument, (serially?) complex but never too dense, and employing many effective textures which not only brought out and enhanced the meaning of the vocal line, but which were musically satisfying as piano writing - never "mere effects" !

I was less satisfied with Simon Desorgher's flute playing. He gave accurate performances of "Syrinx" and Messiaen's "Le Merle Noir", although other flautists were heard to disagree with his tempi in the Debussy, and the

Messiaen was somewhat sectional and not really held together as I believe it can be made to. He also gave the third Birmingham performance of Philip Lane's "Soliloquy I" for solo flute in place of Lane's new piece for flute and piano which was scheduled. This piece has struck me on all three hearings as being too sectional and lacking in any audible cohesion (difficult to achieve in a single melodic line) even though I know that the piece is compactly organised along serial lines and ends with the twelve-note row with which it began retrograded but retaining the same rhythmic order as the beginning. Philip Lane's melodic gift, however, becomes more fully apparent with repeated hearings.

KEITH POTTER