

CONCERT ORGANISER'S REPORT 2015

The 2015 season of *Concerts at Cratfield* consisted of the traditional six fortnightly concerts of chamber music held at St Mary's Church. The staple of our concerts is the classical repertoire and this year was no exception, with Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven well represented. However, we also give our audience the chance to hear the work of less familiar composers. So this year saw performances of works by Walter Piston, Pēteris Vasks, Karol Szymanowski and Peter Maxwell Davies.

Attendances were good, with almost every top price nave seat filled and an average over the season of 82% of all seats sold, slightly up on last year. We were a little unfortunate with the weather, the season opening and closing with grey skies and rain, rather than the sunshine we've come to take for granted at Cratfield.

Each year we try to get the name of Cratfield more widely known. Our publicity efforts resulted in the concerts being regularly featured in the *What's On* columns in the local press; and for the first time we managed to get a number of mentions on BBC Radio 3's *Breakfast* programme. We have continued last year's innovation of asking individual members of our audience each to review one concert they have attended. The reviews are posted unedited on our website, where they can be easily viewed.

The season opened with a performance by the Visontay-Walton-Johnson piano trio which featured a yet-to-be-recorded piece by Peter Maxwell Davies. Our next concert was given by Gallicantus, a five-man *a cappella* group, in a programme of motets by Byrd, Tallis and other composers of the English Renaissance. Although we already knew that here was a superb group of performers, we had some anxiety about how popular such arcane music would turn out to be. However, not only did we have a nearly full house (aided by some extra publicity via local choirs), but the audience reaction and the review it generated verged on the ecstatic. The Navarra Quartet followed, with a splendid programme of twentieth-century chamber music; and in our next concert the Aquinas Piano Trio were joined by Sarah-Jane Bradley (viola) to perform piano quartets by Mozart, Brahms and Walter Piston. The fifth concert was another innovation: a lecture-recital by Roger Parker and the Badke Quartet with the title 'Vienna 1800', featuring string quartets written by Haydn and Beethoven in the eponymous year. Again, any concerns about the viability of such a programme were confounded: more than 200 people – our biggest audience of the season – enjoyed Professor Parker's introduction to the music, then sensitively played by the quartet. The Cavaleri Quartet and Bartholomew LaFollette (cello) brought their concert and our season to an end with a performance of the sublime Schubert C major Quintet.

To sum up then: a very successful year, with a broad range of music and a couple of new ventures which proved popular. That success could not have been achieved without the help of our volunteers who help to get things working smoothly on the day. Our Committee members work tirelessly behind the scenes to make these concerts possible. And St Mary's Church is generous in allowing us to use its splendid building and for providing our concertgoers (and performers) with the excellent tea and cakes which have become such a highlight of the Cratfield experience. To all of these we extend our warmest thanks.

Alan C McLean