

## **Concerts at Cratfield**

### **CONCERT MANAGER'S REPORT – 2017**

The 2017 season of Concerts at Cratfield comprised six fortnightly concerts of chamber music held at St Mary's Church, Cratfield. For the first time this year's programme was devised by my colleague Peter Baker, who laid out a veritable feast of diversity. There was well-loved music from familiar composers (Schubert, Bach, and Beethoven were well represented) and fascinating pieces by less well-known figures such as Suk, Renié, and Röntgen. We were fortunate in having some very distinguished artists performing for us this year. It's a mark of the respect with which Cratfield is held in the classical music community that a group such as the Brodsky Quartet is willing to come to our beautiful little church and close our season by playing one of the greatest masterpieces of the string quartet repertoire.

We opened with 'Fairest Isle', a glorious recital of English song from Purcell to Britten, by the tenor James Gilchrist sensitively accompanied by the pianist Anna Tilbrook. Next came a sparkling concert of Czech music by the exuberant Zemlinsky Quartet – a concert that earned unCratfield-like cheers and foot-stamping at the end!. The Chroma Trio, featuring the harp of Eleanor Turner, gave us a programme of sensuous French music, including a gorgeous piece by the French harpist/composer Henriette Renié. Next we welcomed the Aronowitz Ensemble, well-known for their many Snape appearances, with the pianist Tom Poster, in piano quartets by Fauré and Schubert. The Lendvai String Trio played an intriguing arrangement of Bach's Goldberg Variations for violin, viola, and cello. We like to make our season end with something special and the Brodsky Quartet did not disappoint with their powerful performance of Beethoven's Opus 131 Quartet. After which, one felt, there was nothing more to say.

Attendances were good, but there was a slight drop in the overall percentage of seats filled this year – down to an average of 78%. This is still a pretty remarkable figure for a series of Sunday afternoon classical concerts in rural Suffolk, but we have to try to make sure that this fall does not accelerate. A continuing quirk of these figures is that the higher-priced tickets sell out almost completely (98%), whereas only 78% of the cheapest seats are sold. Some concerts were more popular than others, of course, though to what extent that is to do with the concert programme, the time of year, or the weather, is hard to say. Our policy of offering tickets for all six concerts for the price of five is popular, but it can mean that some people will not attend all six concerts, reasoning correctly that they have had their money's worth already by attending five. From the point of view of attendance, the standout concert was the final one, with more than 230 people turning up for the Brodskys.

Independent reviews of our concerts are commissioned from local music-lovers and posted on our website. We use a wide variety of reviewers and always welcome offers from audience members to write about their responses to concerts they have attended. Detailed academic knowledge of the music is not essential – enthusiasm is. This year the reviews have been of outstanding quality and, taken together, provide a useful record of the year's achievements.

David Mintz, our chairman, has taken over the task of writing the programme notes from his predecessor, Philip Britton, and his scholarly and informative comments have been widely appreciated by performers and audience members alike.

We are grateful to our helpers who put Cratfield brochures and posters in shops, pubs, and cafés in the area. Our concerts are regularly featured in the local press's What's On columns. Given our near-capacity audiences, publicity can hardly hope to have a significant impact on ticket sales; but it is important to keep the name of Cratfield in front of people in the area and beyond.

To sum up then: this has been another very successful year for Cratfield, with a broad range of music and a wide variety of instrumental ensembles. 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 patrons 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  
Concert Manager, Concerts at Cratfield