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Review: Academy of St Olave's Chamber Orchestra, with Jonathon Hunter and Janus Wadsworth, St Olave's Church, York

1:04pm Monday 21st January 2008

The St Olave's Chamber Orchestra played to a packed audience at St Olave's Church in Marygate, under seasoned conductor John Hastie.

An ambitious opening, Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings, had a good tempo and was framed by a scintillating opening and pleasing climax, the rich string textures marred only slightly by issues of tuning.

The focus of the concert was the world premiere of Dick Blackford's Concertante for two horns and orchestra. Horn player Jonathon Hunter commissioned Blackford, an ex-teacher of 36 years at York Sixth Form College, to write for St Olave's.

Typical throughout was the use of beautiful and inventive orchestral colours and well-defined thematic-block structures. The piece was exuberant throughout, and made good use of an antiphonal "call and answer" approach between the horns and orchestra alike.

The moderato opened with just such an antiphonal "fanfare" theme and moved through fast-paced exciting motives.

The lento movement opened with modal Ravel-like chords, but moved on to woodwind-heavy textures leading to a beautiful moment between horns and oboes in quartet.

The final allegro was more reminiscent of Khatchaturian, using syncopated percussion rhythms and darker harmonies. Blackford's wind writing is superb and the piece was very well played and received.

Next was Albinoni/Giazotto's Adagio in G minor for strings and organ, a polished performance with a beautiful solo by leader Claire Jowett and wonderful balance between the strings and the organ. Haydn's Symphony No.101 in D major (The Clock) was energetic, well rehearsed and showed off the string section well.

- Edward Caine

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