

REVIEWS

KATHRYN WHITNEY

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IFFLEY MUSIC SOCIETY: Kathryn Whitney

By Giles Woodforde, *Oxford Times* Arts Reporter

Sir John Eliot Gardiner expects the highest standards. But mezzo Kathryn Whitney has come away from John Eliot's recent Oxford masterclass all the stronger, if her recital for the Iffley Music Society is anything to go by. This was a confidently delivered evening, devoted to English song.

The repertoire sometimes followed a well-trodden path, sometimes featured the entirely unknown. As Ms Whitney pointed out: "We all know the first verse of *Greensleeves*, but how many people know the other 11?" We heard a selection of six verses, as set by Vaughan Williams in his opera *Sir John in Love*. Here, and throughout, there was evidence of excellent bonding with accompanist Philip Bullock. Meanwhile, Charles Villiers Stanford was represented by *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. A setting of words by Keats, the story concerns a knight who meets a powerful woman. This suited Kathryn Whitney well, for her voice is not of a small and retiring disposition. Indeed, early on, she seemed to have some difficulty in steadying her volume down in quieter passages. But by the time she reached George Butterworth's *Is my Team Ploughing?*, Ms Whitney was producing an impressively wide dynamic range. *Team Ploughing* is one of Six Songs from *A Shropshire Lad*, which here received a meaty interpretation. There was a prophetic feeling too, almost as if Butterworth knew that he would soon die in the Battle of the Somme – this was particularly true in *Loveliest of Trees*.

In well-judged total contrast, the evening ended with *Seven What-Nots* by T. C. Sterndale Bennett, grandson of Sir William. "I found them hiding behind some other music in a library," Kathryn Whitney told us. Masterpieces of compact humour, these miniatures should be in every singer's encore repertoire. Take *A Fly and a Flea in a Flue*, for instance. What happened to them? "They flew through a flaw in the flue".

Review of an English Song
Recital for **The Iffley Music Society**, which took place in the church hall in Iffley, Oxfordshire, England

15 January, 2005

REVIEWS (cont'd)

KATHRYN WHITNEY

Opening night review:

The Island Tour 2004

3 September, 2004

English Song recital
tour of Canada's West
Coast featuring new
work by Canadian
composer Lorna
Paterson.

Sooke News Mirror

Wednesday, 8 September 2004

Whitney impresses with English

by John Arnett, *Mirror* Contributor

Music lovers who attend mezzo-soprano Kathryn Whitney's Vancouver Island tour this month are being treated to a rarity in the music world - the English song recital. Whitney likes to characterize her recitals as intimate occasions like inviting people around for dinner - a variation on the kind of musical soirée so popular in Sooke over the years. Well, she served a delicious repast to the music lovers who attended her recital entitled "An Autumn Evening of English Song" in Knox Presbyterian Church last Friday evening. The *à la carte* menu contained a delightful array of mouth-watering morsels guaranteed to whet the appetite of her audience which received her enthusiastically, acknowledging her exceptional vocal talent.

Whitney has undertaken an ambitious seven-concert tour of various Vancouver Island locations during September, returning to Victoria Oct. 1. Sooke was her first outing. Perhaps her timing could have been better because many people were out of town on the last holiday weekend of the summer and with the popular Fling on the Flats (at which she performed incidentally) Sunday the regular contingent of Sooke classical concert goers did not turn out in their usual force, possibly opting for the Sunday concert. Those who did attend were treated to a delightful evening of mainly short but sweet songs, some familiar (no English song recital would be complete without *Greensleeves* or *The Ashgrove*) and all a treat to listen to on a lazy, late summer evening.

The program opened with Ralph Vaughan Williams' delightful *Three Songs from Shakespeare*, very short pieces that set the mood for the evening. Benjamin Britten's tuneful English folk song arrangements were followed by the longest piece of the evening, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* by Charles Villiers Stanford, which Whitney described as a six-minute mini-opera and gave her an opportunity to demonstrate the impressive vocal range that has bought her so much acclaim in British musical circles. A special treat was a new set of songs by Brentwood composer Lorna Paterson composed fittingly enough to texts by Dylan Thomas. Paterson was present at the concert and received the acknowledgement of the audience at the conclusion of the songs.

Intermission was followed by the sometimes hearty *Six songs from A Shropshire Lad* and the evening concluded with what can only be described as seven whimsical pieces under the title of "*Seven What-Nots*" composed by T.C. Sterndale Bennett. Whitney's performance was enhanced by the outstanding playing of accompanist Peter Smith. In fact, lovers of piano music among last Friday's audience would probably agree that they got two outstanding performers for the price of one because of Smith's keyboard talent. A distinguished musician in his own right, Smith's accompaniment came into its own as the icing on the cake during the final seven "*What-Nots*". More information on Whitney's Island tour is available on her website at www.kathrynwhitney.net/tour.