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14th May : Elgar Concert Room

(University of Birmingham)

Lunchtime Concert of works by students in the University music department.

This concert was the first this academic year to be entirely devoted to student compositions and the quality and variety of works performed bodes well for future concerts. It is important that music students should be encouraged to compose and also to perform their works, be it informally or in a concert like this. There were three composers represented, one from each year of the undergraduate course.

The first work was a setting by Elizabeth MacNamara of three metaphysical poems - "Virtue" by George Herbert, "Quickness" by Henry Vaughan and "A Contemplation upon flowers" by Henry King - for tenor and flute. Each setting was very successful and the effect of the whole group even more so. The difficulties of writing for two solo lines were largely overcome and the two lines blended well. Much of the writing, especially for the voice, was in a very "English" style, reminding one strongly of Holst's wonderful songs. The careful and very effective use of melisma (Britten?) was certainly one of the most attractive features of this very successful work.

Alison Rushby's "The Owl and the Pussycat" for reciter and instrumental ensemble proved to be a thoroughly enjoyable romp. The instrumental characterisations of the figures in the poem were most effective and added a great deal to what is a rather boring piece of nonsense verse.

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The parody of the "Wedding March" near the end was a marvellous idea and brought this delightfully light-hearted piece to a successful conclusion.

The final work in this concert was Laurence Williamson's Brass Sextet. This performance was far better rehearsed than the first, which I attended, at the B.M.I. in March. This three-movement serial composition is cast in a fairly traditional mode and showed clearly the dangers, as well as the opportunities offered by an instrumental combination of this kind. The danger of the timbral monotony of six brass instruments was avoided on the whole, although there were moments when one felt that a greater variety of colour was called for. The strength of the work lay in its powerful rhythmic impetus and closely structured form. The ostinati and pedal points and a good deal of melodic and rhythmic vitality carried the pedal points and a good deal of melodic and rhythmic vitality carried the day for this rather choice. day for this rather exciting piece.

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