

Concert of British Light Music - February 26th 2017



A cold, wet, and windy Sunday February 26th saw a second concert of British Light Music performed by the Mark Fitz-Gerald Orchestra. The venue was once again the British Home and Hospital in Streatham, South-West London. The event followed-on from the success of the first concert in 2016, and was held in aid of funds for the Home.

The programme, which was devised – as before – by Ian Finn, included a number of well-known Light Music compositions, together with some lesser-known works.

After the introductory piece, *Theatreland* by Jack Strachey, (which has now become the orchestra's signature tune !), we heard Robert Farnon's *Westminster Waltz*, followed by *The Three Bears – A Phantasy* by 'The Uncrowned King Of Light Music', Eric Coates.

This work has an interesting history. Originally composed in 1926, Coates made a new recording for Decca in London's Kingsway Hall in 1949, featuring a revision of the foxtrot section [sub-titled 'The Three Bears make the best of it and return home in the best of humour']. The brass accompaniment is re-scored to become 'jazzier' than the original, complete with the use of swing rhythms. It appears that Coates approached Robert Farnon, saying 'I can't write jazz, would you mind rewriting this for me?' Bob duly obliged, although he was un-credited on the record and Coates never mentioned his assistance; apparently, it was kept a secret between the two men for many years !

Mark Fitz-Gerald was anxious to use this revised version, and although several enquiries were made, no trace was found of the sheet music. Mark therefore resorted to listening to Coates' recording and transcribing it for performance at this concert; he told me afterwards that he believes he has achieved a pretty accurate replication of Bob Farnon's arrangement.

We were treated to two solo piano interludes by Stephen Dickinson, featuring compositions by Billy

Mayerl. In the first of these, we heard the famous *Marigold – and Autumn Crocus*. Later on in the programme, Stephen played *Shallow Waters* and *Evening Primrose*. A very keen gardener, Mayerl named many of his compositions after plants and flowers !

The orchestra continued with a very interesting, although little-known, work by the London-born Herman Fink – (he of *In The Shadows* fame) – entitled *The Last Dance Of Summer* ; this was followed by the March from Trevor Duncan's *Little Suite*, very familiar due to its use as the signature tune for the television series *Dr. Finlay's Casebook*.

Next-up was a composition by 'our own' Brian Reynolds – *Elizabethan Tapestry*, in a arrangement made for Brian by the late Cyril Watters. We were then treated to a lesser-known but lively composition by Derby-born Percy Eastman Fletcher, from his suite of *Three Light Pieces*, entitled *Lubbly Lulu*, after which the members of the audience were encouraged to join-in with singing the lyrics of John Bratton's world-famous *Teddy Bears' Picnic* – which they did, lustily !

From the set of *Nell Gwyn Dances* by Edward German we heard the *Pastoral Dance*, following which a member of the string section, the soprano Tessa Crilly, stepped forward for a lovely rendition of *I Could Have Danced All Night* from the musical show *My Fair Lady*, by Lerner and Lowe.

The next item was by a 'local boy' – Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, who spent much of his tragically short life in nearby Croydon. From his well-known *Petite Suite de Concert*, we heard *Sonnet d'Amour*.

Stephen Dickinson then joined the ensemble for a performance of Percy Grainger's 'clog dance' *Handel In The Strand*. Although scored for full orchestra, the piece was notable for *not* including the double basses !

The final 'billed' item was another Eric Coates masterpiece – in fact probably one of his most famous and frequently-played tunes – the march *Knightsbridge* from his *London Suite*.

After a rousing response from the audience demanding an encore, Mark Fitz-Gerald and his orchestra brought the proceedings to their final conclusion with the well-known *Jamaican Rhumba* by the Australian composer Arthur Benjamin.

It was great to be present at this most enjoyable afternoon, presented by such an enthusiastic musical director – and champion of Light Music – and his excellent orchestra, and it is hoped that they will return once again in 2018.

Very many thanks to Mark Fitz-Gerald, to Ian Finn, and to the British Home and Hospital at Streatham.

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