

## **Concert Review By Roland Williams**

The Accordion Department of the Royal Academy of Music is a small one but its students never fail to come up with concert programmes of great interest and high quality of performance. In its spring term evening concert on March 25th all the works performed used the accordion as a major part in chamber works with other instruments, demonstrating the great versatility of the instrument in the performance of ancient, modern and indeed new works.

Starting with Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998), Katariina Ahjoniemi (accordion), and Soila Hakkinen (violin) performed three movements from the 'Suite in Old Style', a work that sounds well with an accordion, especially considering the composer's known ambivalent attitude to the accordion. There followed a little known but very effective cello sonata by Pietro Locatelli (1695-1764), with Joseph Butler (cello) and Katariina Ahjoniemi (accordion). The work featured brilliant display playing in its outer movements.

From ancient music the concert moved to a new work by Dr Timothy Bowers, a tutor at the Royal Academy. Using accordion (played by Ilona Suomalainen) and violin (played by Soila Hakkinen), Dr Bowers produced 'Two Paganini Fantasies': 'Tzigane' and 'Themes on a Rap', by Paganini. Well known themes of Paganini were worked into modern pop styles with great fun and applause for the composer at the end as well as the performers.

The surprise and longest work in the concert was a delightful and rarely heard piece by the Czech composer Vaclav Trojan (1907-1983) entitled 'The Emperor's Nightingale'. It consists of 10 movements each with a title illustrating the Hans Andersen story of the Chinese Emperor and the nightingale whose beautiful song eventually becomes the Emperor's saviour from death. It is a wonderful use of accordion, violin and guitar excellently performed by Soila Hakkinen (violin), Mircea Gogoncea (guitar), and Ilona Suomalainen (accordion).

The final item on the programme was a piece by Gustavo Beytelmann (b 1946) entitled 'Encuentro' in which the Polish accordion player Bartosz Glowacki led an ensemble of 5 players. Another rarity, much in the style of Astor Piazzolla. Bartosz is undoubtedly becoming one of the Academy stars.

This was an accordion concert full of interest and surprises demonstrating the wonderful versatility of the instrument and moreover the excellent opportunity an Accordion Department operating within a major conservatoire can provide for students. As Owen Murray, Head of Department, pointed out in his note to the programme students have also had the opportunity to perform with professional musicians in new works requiring accordion at the Royal Opera House and the Lindbury Studio theatre. This experience shone through in the performance of this well put together programme.