

# Festival concert provides a journey of musical discovery

The Haslemere Festival has centred much of its imaginative programme on its local talent.

An example of this talent is the pianist Béla Hartmann, of German-Czech origin, but now resident in Haslemere.

For his piano recital in St Christopher's Church, Wey Hill, on May 16, Béla Hartmann presented an exceptionally well-judged programme, spanning the musical styles from Bach to late Dvorak, the sound world of each work seeming to inform and lead to that of the next, so that we were as if embarked on a seamless journey of musical discovery.

Béla Hartmann opened his recital with Bach's *Italian Concerto of 1730*, an imposing piece in whose sonorities the composer apes the textures of a full baroque orchestra.

The pianist responded to this music with playing of the utmost rhythmical tautness and dexterity, and with a relentless forward drive in the rapid finale.

After a musical "sorbet" in the form of Haydn's delicious *Variations in F Minor*, the first half ended with Mozart's *Sonata in A Minor, K 310*.

In this piece, so revolutionary for its time, and with more than a premonition of the demonic Beethoven to come, the pianist kept one foot firmly in the 18th century, especially in the sublime second movement, while not afraid to subject the fiery outer movements to the robust pianism it demands.

For the second half, Béla Hartmann moved

forward to the 19th century, but eschewed the better-known romantic workhorses for the piano, in favour of two large-scale, but lesser-known works by Brahms and Dvorak.

The Brahms was the early four *Opus 10 Ballades*, full of dark mutterings and plaintive melodies and ending, at the end of the last ballade, with music that almost brings itself to a standstill in its introspective questioning.

This is not the easiest music to absorb at first hearing, but the pianist presented it with a beauty of tone and understanding of structure that rendered them totally convincing.

Finally we heard Dvorak's *Suite in A, Opus 92*, written while the composer was staying in New York, at about the same time as the composition of the *New World Symphony*.

The five movements explore extreme contrasts of mood, from the fiery chordal sequences of the quick passages to the sublime extended melody of the andante.

In this music, the pianist was obviously totally at home, and left us eager to become more familiar with Dvorak's other compositions for the piano.

The feast was not quite over yet. For his encore Béla Hartmann served up Liszt's *Transcendental Study, La Campanella*.

This is a piece that always requires dazzling pyrotechnics, but on this occasion this remarkable pianist seemed to summon up an extra demon to perform it at a speed and with a technical wizardry almost beyond belief.

Tony Goldman