



## Wihan String Quartet

Concert date: 15 October 2023

Reviewed by: JRC

### The Wihan String Quartet after their performance for NADSA Concerts

#### Bohemian Rhapsody

Freddie Mercury was teamed up with Montserrat Caballe, and it worked! Why? Because both of those performers, one from the 'pop' genre and the other 'high' opera, hit the senses directly. A visceral sensation.

The Wihan had flown from Bohemia into England for their concert at the Courtenay Centre. Very used to travelling the best concert halls of the globe, coming back to Newton Abbot must be something unusual for them; and it certainly was for the audience.

They played Smetana's Quartet No 2 in D minor, Dvorak's Quartet No 10 in E flat and Janacek's Quartet No 2 'Intimate Letters', - all Bohemian/Czech composers for this Czech quartet. Similarities didn't end there, for what they brought to each piece was a riveting intensity.

Smetana's last string quartet was written when he had been deaf and severely ill with syphilis for many years. It is amazing that it is so richly episodic from fire to delicate poignancy, and even has a compulsive polka. The Wihan seemed to be the embodiment of the abrupt changes of mood and narrative in a manner that was thoroughly engaging.

With the opening of the first movement of the Dvorak quartet, I was impressed how suddenly the melodic growth had felt orchestral, - but there were still only four instruments playing! Quickly we were swept into a dance, as was the case in all movements except the third 'Romanza' where we became party to crafted romantic sentimentality.

Romance in mind, Janacek's 'Intimate Letters' are more a personal outpouring of his obsessive love for the much younger, and married, Kamila Stosslova. The drama of the opening movement quickly gave way to unnerving bowing on the bridge; and thus the scene was set for spasmodic wistfulness, also frenzied madness to distraction. This was musical drama pushed to the limits.

Recovering from the emotional stress of the performance, the audience was asking for an encore. We were given the first of Dvorak's two Waltzes for Strings Op.54. How appropriate it was: a lilting soothing waltz - the perfect antidote to the angst of Janacek!

In trying to seek the causes of a visceral sensation, one is on a hiding to nothing. However, there are contributory factors that go towards such a happening. Here we had 4 soloist performers acting as one emotional entity of musical charisma, and who else would perform such a programme of wholly Czech profundity? This was a unique experience. A member of the audience quipped "superlatives well earned".

Don't go to U Tube and expect to get a thrill from recordings of the same repertoire; you will be bitterly disappointed. This was a one-off experience.

One doesn't go to a NADSA concert and be pleased that the right notes are played. We expect more: to have the senses inexplicably roused. We indeed had the 'Mercury/Caballe' experience: a Bohemian Rhapsody.

This concert was sponsored by Rathbone Investment Management