

## 2017 Concert Report

After the work leading up to the Festival, everyone was looking forward to lovely summer evenings to grace the concerts. Sadly, it was not to be this year: in the afternoon of the first concert strong winds and heavy rain brought down the tarpaulin erected to shelter the refreshment tables in the churchyard, and on two evenings interval refreshments had to be served inside the church. The day of the third concert, some audience members found the weather was too difficult to travel, others were late arriving as the car park was flooded. Chris Symons's dream in the programme notes of "... the evening sun gilding the hills" remained unfulfilled on all four evenings, our musicians arrived safely both Fridays, albeit rather later than planned.

But of the music there is only good news, and here I must declare an interest. Haydn and Mozart are two of my favourite chamber music composers, so I was delighted to have both on the programme for the opening concert. Haydn's last completed quartet, Op. 77 No 2, opened the Festival, its 4<sup>th</sup> movement *Finale* full of energy and exhilaration. Then came Mozart's penultimate string quartet, No. 22 in B flat, whose 2<sup>nd</sup> movement echoed arias from the Magic Flute and Marriage of Figaro. Ravel's Quartet in F was enthusiastically received by the many Ravel devotees, who left the church full of praise for the Allegris' performance of this work.

More Haydn opened concert 2: Op. 33 No. 1, in which violinists Martyn and Raffy excelled in the rapid arpeggios of the last movement. Barber's Adagio for Strings was for me one of the most memorable pieces of this Festival, an elegiac piece exquisitely played. I do hope it is programmed again sometime. Another late quartet after the interval, this time Schubert's last, No. 15, D887, composed in 10 days and strongly influenced by Beethoven. An impressive finish to the first weekend.

The Festival's second weekend began with the uplifting opening of Mozart's String Quartet No. 14; this concluded with some scintillating counterpoint. Early Beethoven followed – String quartet No. 2, in which the elaborate dialogue between the players was magical. Possibly the first Dvorak quartet to be heard at Llanfyllin came after the interval, No. 10 in E flat. This early "Slavic" quartet has rustic moments, syncopation, and in the last movement, an orchestral scale of sound, all beautifully achieved. Even though Martyn, first violinist, was suffering from a stomach bug such was his professionalism and artistry no one could tell he was physically below par that evening.

A capacity audience squeezed into the church for the final concert, which started with Mozart's Quintet no. 5, Felix Tanner joining the Allegrì as guest violist. However, in this work the cello is possibly the most favoured instrument especially in its sustained dialogue with the first violin in the second movement. Strauss's sextet from Capriccio brought Reinoud "Ren" Ford, cello, to the platform with the other five musicians for this lovely piece,

last played at Llanfyllin some 13 years ago, and much appreciated by this year's audience. Ren had played for us in 2016 and we were delighted to have him play for us again.

Fortunately, the weather relented enough for interval refreshments outside, and then it was the final music for this year, Brahms's string sextet No 1, an exciting and energetic piece with an appropriate jubilant finish with which to conclude the 2017 Festival.

The four concerts of the 2017 season were a musical success, and despite the appalling weather showed a 20% increase in audience numbers. Thank you to all who came, and for those who didn't, hopefully I have whetted your appetite for next year.