



A Review by Ian Milnes

Tone-Acity with Andy Martin

Saturday 23rd January 2010, 7.30pm

Hamilton Street Methodist Church is to be congratulated on attracting first rate musicians who haven't been there before. This was the case on Saturday evening, 23rd January, when the outer sections of each part were devoted to Tone-Acity, an excellent, prize-winning, versatile ladies' vocal quartet, with local guitarist Andy Martin providing a group of splendidly played pieces in the middle of each half. The Church's organist and concert organiser, John Evans, introduced and welcomed the performers, who then introduced their respective items, in a cheery manner which well entertained the audience!

Tone-Acity sings everything unaccompanied and from memory, with wonderfully co-ordinated movements and expressions, communicating a great joyfulness to the listeners. They introduced themselves by name later on in the concert: Lesley, whose sister Lorna sings the lowest line with admirable strength and depth; Jenny is their sister-in-law and takes the higher lines with Lesley, while Claire is the only one who isn't a relative and is responsible for sounding a pitch pipe to give the starting key of each piece. Their quality of singing, and the feeling of their interpretations, both in solo parts and in ensemble, is truly outstanding. They are equally accomplished in brilliant, virtuosic music, passages with effective modulations, as well as quiet, lyrical pieces in which they produced some fine very quiet tone quality, and their wordless singing was magical. They sang four pieces in their first group: "Grease" (full of vigour!), "You Can Count on Me" (with some beautiful wordless harmonies), "Candle On The Water" (magical, especially in their quiet singing) and the title song from "Fame" (strongly rhythmical, brilliant).

Andy Martin played five pieces in this first part of the concert. Though he spoke entertainingly, he didn't tell the audience the titles, only that some came from the 1960's and 1970's, the fourth piece was by George Harrison (one of the Beatles), and the third one was the famous Romanza, whose composer is anonymous, which received a specially moving performance. In all these pieces, Andy displayed his versatility and fine technique, well enhanced by his use of an amplified bass line, below the upper melodic lines and inner harmonies, sounding as if there was more than one guitarist playing!

The four ladies returned and went straight into an easy-going reading of "Red Hot", followed by a lovely, lyrical and gentle interpretation of "Can You Feel". Then came "My Foolish Heart", with which they won the Gold Medal in Gateshead last year, and they also did remarkably well internationally, coming 33rd out of 54 in Nashville, USA – all really well deserved from the evidence of this lovely, gentle, lyrical performance with some of the most exquisite quiet singing of the evening: absolutely memorable, along with "Red Hot Mamma" to make a splendidly vigorous, rhythmic end to this group of four and of the first part of the concert.

After a lively performance of a close harmony piece, "If I Were You" to start the second part, Lesley introduced the four of them, as detailed earlier, and then gave a gentle, lyrical reading of "Mood Indigo". There were some beautiful solo passages over lovely harmonies (with some effective modulations) in "Amazing Grace", ending this group of four pieces with "Let It Be", again with some memorable solo singing around beautiful harmonies as well as some moving unison sections. Andy Martin returned and played seven really well-contrasted pieces, showing the full range of his versatility, in jazz styles, waltz melodies, contrasting strong rhythms with lyricism in one piece, and superb control of dynamics and rhythm in the 6th piece (Norwegian Wood, by John Lennon and Paul McCartney), finishing with a gentle, swaying interpretation of "Cavatina" by Stanley Myers (from the film "The Deer Hunter").

The concert concluded with another group of four pieces sung by Tone-Acity, firstly with a very lively, jolly performance of "Moondance". Claire then introduced "When I Fall in Love", since she sang it at Lesley's wedding last year, and the group gave us a really beautiful, gentle performance, followed by a very uplifting reading of "Impossible Dream". John Evans gave a well-deserved vote of thanks to all the performers, which was followed by a lively interpretation of "One Fine Day" in a jazz arrangement, which brought a splendid ovation from the enthusiastic audience of around 50 people. It was a pity that more people weren't present to experience the great atmosphere created by this wonderful evening's music-making.

The next concert is on Thursday 11th March at 7.30pm, to be given by "the world's most versatile organist", Carol Williams (San Diego's civic organist).

Reviewed by Ian Milnes – 29/01/2010