

Clare Southworth with the Chelmsford Sinfonietta

Clare Southworth's appearance with the Chelmsford Sinfonietta on May the 8th 2010 was part of a three-day subscription- and commercially-sponsored festival in Chelmsford Cathedral, featuring a talented orchestra built from a quorum of local musicians. The programme consisted of Wagner's Siegfried Idyll, the Reinecke flute concerto and the Eroica Symphony, conducted by David Gibson.

Reinecke wrote the flute concerto at the end of his life, after a long career in his native Germany which was devoted partly to violin, partly to piano and partly to conducting, as well as to a large output of compositions. The work shows the influence of his friends Mendelssohn and Schumann as well as, inevitably, that of Wagner. Clare Southworth's interpretation of it is stylish, colourful and well-rounded. It is an inevitable fact of life that some composers, like Brahms, for example, take considerable trouble over performance markings, while others, like Tchaikovsky, tend to dash them off in more perfunctory fashion, thus leaving the performance's fate more in the hands of the musicians. Maybe we cannot know to what extent Reinecke's markings are attributable to the flautist Schwedler's influence or intervention, but in the first movement I would have preferred to hear a bolder degree of disrespect shown towards some of the received phrasing and slurring in the busier passages of this movement, simply to make this carefully crafted music more effective than it succeeds in being on the page.

In the mysterious second movement the flute's subtle and improvisatory narrative started to become submerged by increasingly robust orchestral accompaniment, a fact which seemed to go quite unheeded by the conductor. However, in the third and final movement, Miss Southworth took the opportunity to fight back with a glittering display of technical fireworks, and succeeded in showing who was master. The capacity audience showed their enthusiastic appreciation both of her performance and of this attractive and well-wrought work, which deserves to be heard more often.

Richard Stagg