

Camilleri wind works

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Wind Works by Charles Camilleri. Sheffield University Wind Orchestra conducted by Anthony Houghton, 2007.

Containing four wind works by Charles Camilleri, this is the first commercial CD release by the newly established recording label of the Music Department of Sheffield University.

Last May, 30 members of the University's Wind Orchestra, conducted by Anthony Houghton, recorded Camilleri's enthralling *Brass Quintet*, the *Picasso Set for Wind Quintet*, *Images Sans Frontières* for four B-flat clarinets, and *Il Nostro Tempo*, a new piece for symphonic wind ensemble.

Commissioned by the Fine Arts Brass Ensemble, the *Brass Quintet* was premiered in January 1985 at the City Music Society, London.

The first movement, *Allegro*, begins with two trumpets announcing a fanfare-like staccato motif which is reiterated and reworked throughout the movement with the concurrent support of open-fifths on the other instruments.

The second movement, *Lento*, evokes the aura of a 'hypnotic chant'. Introduced by a longish

solo call on the horn, tailed off by a glissando, this slow and static movement achieves its compact sound through skilful dovetailing of cluster chords aptly played by the musicians.

The 'organised chaos', a hallmark of works by Camilleri, hinted in the first movement, is patently present in the third movement, *Allegro deciso*. A quasi-improvised middle section announced by the solo trombone draws the listener's attention to the tone qualities of the horn, trombone and tuba. Through skilful manipulation of their registers Camilleri obscures their individual timbre. The tension that gradually builds up throughout this movement resolves itself in the parallel harmony that develops in the third and concluding section. Overall, this recording manifests brilliant teamwork in this extremely difficult and technically demanding work.

Written in the early 1960s, the six-movement *Picasso Set for Wind Quintet* was inspired by a Picasso touring exhibition which the composer visited. The first movement, *Foxtrot*, introduces the light vein of this composition with a sweet melody that shortly after transforms itself into intricate instrumental dialogues. The light



vein that resumes in the second movement *Gavotte*, is momentarily brought to a halt in *Mural*. This lovely third movement reminds the listener of the solo opening on the horn in the second movement of the *Brass Quintet*.

The dissonant harmonies of the fourth movement (*Primitif*) require sharp articulation which, is here maintained throughout. The cheerful mood of the first two movements re-emerges in the fifth, *Blues*, with an introductory solo on the clarinet. However, the composer retains a link with the sense of the 'primitive' evoked in the previous movement not only through the application of parallel dissonant chord movements but also through an effective use of relatively long solos.

In the last movement (*Circus Waltz*) Camilleri instigates a parody in line with the artistic parodies of Picasso and his mockery of the serious. The movement benefits greatly from the rich tone quality of the bassoon superbly played by Linda Hetherington.

Images Sans Frontières for four B-flat clarinets consists of seven movements. The theme-improvisation-theme of the first movement announces the cohesive character of this work. Besides its placement in the first movement the same theme serves as a nice contrast to the contrapuntal work that unfolds in the subsequent movement (*Kontra-punti*), of an interlude in the fourth movement and, finally, as a conclusion in the last movement.

The playful character of this main theme is somewhat restrained here. On the other hand, the four clarinetists show brilliant teamwork in, for instance, the fifth movement (*Ritual*) and the choir-like style of the sixth movement (*Sacred and Profane*).

Images of the mystical are portrayed in the third movement (*Couleurs Statiques*) whose prolonged notes and chords recall the mystical sound of the Japanese Shakuhachi (end-blown flute).

Il Nostro Tempo was premiered by the same wind orchestra in April at Firth Hall (University of Sheffield). In this three-movement work Camilleri depicts "some of man's great achievements in our time, his distractive elements and his slow process of awareness of the power of love and spirituality."

The first movement (*Space Probes*) features contrasting timbres, textures and harmonies. The sense of mystery that characterises it is transformed into images of war and destruction in the second movement, described as a *Death March*. It starts on a solo side drum, after which the entire ensemble joins in on a journey of horror and distress. The quasi-improvisatory style used in this movement present several challenges in terms of ensemble playing; however, the recording reveals teamwork and a very strong commitment by individual players.

From a simple melody the last movement (*Awareness*) grows gradually until it reaches vibrant rejoicing, a climax very well sustained by the effective use of the percussion section. Camilleri's *Il Nostro Tempo* is a major new addition to the wind ensemble repertoire, a contemporary showpiece for a symphonic wind band.

Sliema band in New Year's day concert

The Sliema Philharmonic band will present a musical programme on New Year's Day at the Dar tal-Providenza complex in Siggiewi at 10 p.m.

In the grand finale of the fundraising marathon, conducted by Mro. Ronnie Debattista, the band will perform lively works like *Spanish Gypsy Dance* by Pascal Marquina, *O Surdato Nnamurato* by Ennio Cannio, *Sliemalta* by Ronnie Pisani and Giuseppe Verdi's *Brindisi* from *La Traviata*.

The three main television stations will join forces to broadcast the event, which will climax at midnight, when the final donated amount will be announced.

Preparations are also in full swing for the Sliema Youth Big Band and Musical and Vocal concert of lively jazz and swing music conducted by Mro. Sigmund Mifsud lined up for January 19 at the Sacred Heart Convent in St Julian's. Ticket hotline is 9944 3460.

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