



[The Manchester Mid-Day Concerts Society](#)

Reflections on two performances at [The Bridgewater Hall](#)
by [Charlotte Starkey](#) March 2012

Another season of [The Manchester Mid-Day Concerts](#) is drawing to a close with the last concert on Thursday, 19th April. Whilst these observations are written towards the end of a memorable season of music, this is a useful moment to look back briefly at a couple of recent concerts in preparation for what is to come in the forthcoming season beginning later this year.

The season runs from autumn to spring; concerts take place mid-week, with each performance lasting for about one hour, and in this current season they begin at 1.10 p.m. For those who may not know about these concerts, or have yet to enjoy what they have to offer, it is a chance to emphasise the wonderful opportunity they provide each year, during the season, for music of the highest quality.

The Manchester Mid-Day Concerts are an important feature of the classical music scene in Manchester and have been for nearly a century. The Society started life in 1915 and is now one of the largest of its kind in the country. Essentially these concerts provide a platform for outstanding young musicians to gain ever more experience of public performance, an invaluable opportunity to perform for audiences at professional concert standard. It has major supporting bodies from the world of the Arts as well as a long collaborative link with the Musicians' Benevolent Fund and The Young Classical Artists Trust - important organisations in the world of music with self-evident titles. There is a growing list of Friends of the Society and the concerts have a faithful following across all ages through individual and group bookings.

Manchester's own distinguished musical tradition is well represented at the Mid-Day Concerts with musicians from Chetham's and the Royal Northern College of Music appearing. Past students of the RNCM were performing, on Wednesday 21st March, as the wind quintet **Souza Winds**,

which is now a well-established and important wind quintet with growing reputations for its members. Musicians come from further afield as well. The week before, on Tuesday 13th March, the pianist Richard Uttley performed a number of pieces chosen from a wide range of musical periods; He studied at Cambridge with outstanding success before establishing an important reputation as a pianist and teacher of music after graduation.

Certainly for those with a convenient lunchtime break during a busy working day, an early finish at lunchtime for the day, a visit to the city on a mid-weekday, or just a desire to listen to live music, this is a great opportunity to hear live performances by classical instrumentalists who are already established with solid reputations growing steadily. This season (2011/2012) the concerts take place weekly on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday and one needs to check the programme first.

The atmosphere of the Bridgewater is welcoming and impressive; seating for these concerts is

entirely in the stalls and there are no reservations. Usually one can turn up, buy a ticket at a very reasonable price, perhaps have a coffee or a meal beforehand or after the performance, and most importantly settle back for a varied programme. One can choose from a variety of performances over the season. One week may be devoted to strings and piano, another to a wind ensemble or solo guitar, trombone, saxophone, a quartet, voice and piano, piano soloist – there is something for most lovers of instrumental classical music during the season.

There is then, of course, the music. Over a series a vast range of music is performed from Bach to Gershwin, Scarlatti to Britten, traditional to the most recent compositions, and everything in between. Performances in the Bridgewater Hall, the current venue for the Mid-Day Concerts, are always exhilarating with one of the finest sound-qualities of any concert hall. It is ideal for the small ensemble, the solo instrumentalist, as much as it is for the full concert orchestra.



So it was on Tuesday 13th March with **Richard Uttley** at the piano. One of the great advantages of these concerts is that they enable the audience to appreciate the range of instruments seen in the full orchestra but here performing often to pieces specifically written for the instrument as a solo performance. The piano is, possibly, the most richly endowed

instrument with music specifically written for it – a complete orchestra in itself with a range of pitch unequalled except by the organ.

Richard Uttley studied music at Clare College, Cambridge, one of a number of colleges there with a strong musical tradition, and later the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Clare has its own regular concert programmes and a growing list of distinguished instrumentalists, vocalists and conductors. Uttley demonstrated the importance of modern compositions for him in the ***Three Mazurkas Opus 27***

by Thomas Adès, himself a graduate of King's College, Cambridge. Adès has an ever growing reputation here and abroad for major compositions and the mazurkas played were premiered at Carnegie Hall in New York in 2010. The contrasting sharp patterning of the Adès Mazurkas beautifully fitted with the earlier

Five Mazurkas, Op. 7

, of Chopin. Adès runs across the whole of the keyboard and passages were played confidently by Richard Uttley just as earlier he had brought out the richness of Chopin with the chords sustaining the melody in the treble clef. Uttley illustrated sensitively the dance motif in the third of these Chopin pieces in F Minor and he moved effortlessly towards the final 'unresolved' note of the last Mazurka which yet seemed so totally natural almost as a final sigh. Yet in the later Adès Mazurkas, in contrast, it was possible to hear how well the tonal patterns flowed seamlessly from the immediately preceding work by Debussy.

Here the Debussy (*Images from Book I - Images, Première Série* 1905) is musically so close to the Impressionist painters – creating textures and colours in sound from the opening gentle play of hands through the grand movement of the second section ('Hommage à Rameau) to the quick tempo and flighty movement of the third. The whole programme began with the famous *Partita No. 1 in B flat*

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BWV 825

by Bach (the date given as 1726) played beautifully by Richard Uttley. This performance, especially in the Fourth section (*Sarabande*

) had strong echoes of the harpsichord tradition for which Bach composed so much music.



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