

MUSIC FOR A WHILE

A Tribute to Jeffery Dench by his Fellow Actors and Musicians.

Kempe Studio 31.1.15 and 1.2.15

Jeffery Dench was a much loved and respected long-term RSC actor and local resident. He was also a great music lover and staunch supporter of the Kempe Society where he regularly performed and attended, and for a number of years served as Chairman.

In his honour his great friend Cordula Kempe devised this wonderful memorial work, 'Music for a While', very much a labour of love involving a huge amount of work to compose a highly complex, rich and varied script and to assemble and co-ordinate a cast of 14 leading RSC actors and distinguished musicians. It was a fitting tribute worthy the man who was not just a great actor and music lover but a great human being, modest, sensitive, humorous, generous of spirit and with a total lack of ego.

The next generation was represented by his grandson Oliver who has just made his very promising RSC debut; the family was also represented by Jeffrey's widow Ann. His sister Judi, Patron of the Society, unfortunately couldn't make it because of a change in her work commitments, but she recorded a warm tribute which was played before the performance.

The clever programme reflected some of Jeffery's favourite poetry and music, much of which he himself had recited over the years; a full, lively and varied blend of music, poetry and prose, serious, amusing and often touching. It began with Purcell, the splendid 'Introduction to the Fairy Queen' and the title song (from Oedipus), 'Music for a while shall all your cares beguile', sung exquisitely by soprano Helen-Jane Howells with her delightfully natural voice, accompanied by Gabija Butkute on piano with superb baroque playing.

There were too many highlights, both musical and literary, to mention in this immensely rich programme. The Bergonzis - Cordula Kempe and Barbara O'Reilly, violins, Cristinel Bacanu, viola, Peter Wilson and Sara Rees, cellos - played beautifully, particularly in the heart-rending 'Cavatina' by Beethoven and in the little-known Sitkovetsky string adaptation of Bach's Goldberg Variations'. Their sense of style and differentiated expression in music covering four centuries was remarkable.

The text related Jeffery's story and included superbly understated renditions of Shakespeare's Sonnets 12 and 66 by Clifford Rose, a powerfully intense recitation by Sonia Ritter from Schiller's 'Gods of Greece' accompanied by Schubert's Minuetto from the D 804 Quartet, a really lucid reading of Hopkins' 'Binsey Poplars' by Karen

Drury, and a marvellous performance of The Winter's Tale Act III Scene 3 by Timothy West and Oliver Dench,.

There was also some fine and humorous reading, as well as ad-libbing, from a mischievous Nicholas Day, whilst Jennifer McEvoy added her usual warmth and humanity to everything she did. And it was particularly poignant to hear recordings of Jeffery himself in his magnificent rendition of 'Jossel Rackover Speaks to God', and of Prospero's great Act IV Scene 1 speech from The Tempest.

This magical evening ended perfectly with a sublime performance of Schubert's Adagio from the String Quintet in C, and a beautiful rendering of Jeffery's favourite song, Schubert's 'Du Holde Kunst' - 'Thou Lovely Art', preceded by a quote from Sappho which epitomized Jeffery and the whole event -

'The muses have made me happy in my lifetime,
And when I die, I shall not be forgotten'.

ALEX AUSTIN