



Innovation Chamber Ensemble

Reviews

The incredible string band

His story illustrates both how a career can be carved out in the classical music business, and how difficult it can be to hit the heights to which all budding virtuosi aspire. For Jenkinson really is a virtuoso, even if his success is due less to a miraculous gift than to single-minded slog. Born in Derby, he developed a taste for music by eavesdropping as his amateur-violinist father played quartets with friends; he started cello lessons at five, then won a county scholarship to study with a top-flight teacher. He began commuting to London to study with the cello guru William Pleeth, under whom he continued his studies at the Guildhall. There he fought off formidable competition from pianists and fiddlers to win the biennial gold medal. Its previous winner had been Paul Lewis, the much-garlanded Schubert specialist whose Wigmore concerts now sell out long in advance. Jenkinson won more prizes (including a big one in Italy), went to study in America, made a Martinu recording, and was invited to guest with the Irish Chamber Orchestra, before becoming the last person Sir Simon Rattle hired before he left the CBSO for Berlin. In the meantime Jenkinson was invited to play for Sir Georg Solti, who gave him some advice he's been trying to follow ever since. It sounds pathetically banal. "He told me you need a gimmick, something unique." Being good - even very good - is just not enough.

Apart from media-friendly jinks like playing for the Selena Scott Show on St Valentine's Day, Jenkinson's strategy has been to plough a lone furrow, both in terms of his music - often premiering new works - and where he plays it. He performs the complete Brahms and Beethoven sonatas in remote parts of Scotland, and was recently filmed doing the Bach solo suites in Birmingham's Ikon Gallery. "All the art was taken out, and I became the exhibit. It was a completely different experience from a normal concert. People could choose how to listen - to lie down on cushions, or walk about - and how much to listen to." His dream is to figure on the cover of a Deutsche Grammophon recording of those suites, "but that will take a lot more luck than I've had so far." But he has had some luck. The CD that ICE recorded at its inaugural concert in Birmingham is about to go into profit, and when it does, the ensemble will make another.

ICE is at the Wigmore Hall, London W1 (020-7935 2141) at 7.30pm tonight

Concert review: Innovation Ensemble at Concord College | Shropshire Star

First, cellist Richard Jenkinson and pianist Benjamin Frith played a sonata by Debussy. The music received the virtuosic treatment it deserved, as did the same composer's sonata for violin and piano in which violinist Zoe Beyers joined Mr Frith. The first half of the concert ended with a rarely heard sonata for violin and cello by Ravel, apparently a homage to Debussy who died in 1918, two years before its composition. No melancholy, however, as this is a spirited, vivacious work which actually made the audience laugh aloud as the two players did a musical to and fro which suggested a game of tennis. All three musicians gave exemplary performances; the string players both had a cool, slightly detached tone well suited to the French music and Mr Frith's piano playing was by turns exquisitely delicate and brisk, especially in the cello sonata. Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time was the sole work after the interval. Clarinettist Mark O'Brien joined the previously mentioned musicians to give an outstanding performance of one of the most emotionally challenging works in the entire chamber music repertoire.