

## Amersham Concert Club's 55<sup>th</sup> Season – Sat 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021

### Outstanding musicianship from Alexei Watkins (French horn) and Harry Rylance (piano)

Those music lovers who braved the wintry weather on Saturday evening were treated to some wonderful music by this exciting duo. The programme was devised as a "Celebration of Dennis Brain," the very distinguished French horn player who was born 100 years ago this year. They began with a lovely performance of Beethoven's Horn Sonata. The second movement was a fine indication of the depth and intensity of their playing. Alexei explained that the Sonata had been written for the virtuoso horn player Giovanni Punta but that Beethoven had not had time to write his part for the piano and was forced to improvise at the first performance. The work certainly provided plenty of challenges for both players which were met superbly.

The second piece was "Elegie (In memory of Dennis Brain)" written by Poulenc on hearing of the sudden death of Dennis, in a car crash, at a tragically young age. This was quite a challenging piece, moving between quiet, mournful reflection and harsh discordance. It was followed by Harry Rylance performing Berceuse and Finale from Stravinsky's Firebird Suite arranged for solo piano. This was a real tour-de-force with quiet dreamy playing in the Berceuse and the runs and crashing chords of the monumental ending of the Finale.

This most enjoyable programme included a wide range of pieces from Messiaen's work for solo horn "Appel Interstellaire" to "Hunter's Moon" by Vinter. The audience's enjoyment and understanding was enhanced by Alexei's informative introductions to all of the pieces. Whether explaining about the musical techniques involved or telling anecdotes about the origins of a piece, he was informative and engaging. After the interval, Alexei answered questions from the audience about the history of the French horn and its predecessors and about the challenges of playing the instrument.

This most enjoyable recital ended with an encore - a lively performance of the Rondo from Mozart's 4<sup>th</sup> Horn concerto made famous by Flanders and Swann's song "I once had a whim..."

JF

30.11.21