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David Alberman/ Caius Consort at Christ Church, Spitalfields, E1

Richard Morrison



You are unlikely to hear another fiddle concerto like Diana Burrell's Concerto for Violin Plus. For one thing, the "plus" includes a singer — Loré Lixenberg, swooping and whooping while melodramatically hitting tubular bells. She acts as a kind of John the Baptist to the violinist's Jesus, preparing the way for his coming. Or perhaps as Aaron to his Moses, interpreting his message for others.

The "others" include the orchestra, divided into three groups, each interacting with the soloist in turn. The instruments in those groups — synths and percussion; a Baroque-style ensemble; and a string quartet — determine the mood of these dialogues, though in each you sense the violin as an outsider trying to forge links.

Finally, though, the soloist steps forward and engages in an intense duo with the singer, who delivers non-verbal cries reminiscent of Berio or Stockhausen. And the rest of the music? Wild and primordial in places, but with a gentle, Eastern-tinged middle passage. Even with David Alberman's passionate playing of the solo part, and with the Trinity College of Music Contemporary Music Group delivering good support under Gregory Rose's direction, it doesn't exactly seduce the ear. Yet its novelty and integrity won this premiere a prolonged ovation.

The Spitalfields Festival (where Burrell is artistic director) certainly packs in a diverse array of concerts. Earlier that evening the Caius Consort, a small voices-and-instruments ensemble from the Cambridge college of approximately the same name, presented 17th-century German Lutheran Vespers, directed by Geoffrey Webber. Familiar Buxtehude and Schütz was sung with a pleasingly light touch, and florid solos tackled confidently, especially by a well-focused young bass, Thomas Faulkner. Best of all, the Vespers included rare gems — notably a syncopated *Jubilate Deo* by Christoph Bernhard and a startlingly chromatic *Salve coelestis* by Franz Tunder — that ought to be taken up by choirs everywhere.

They weren't the only novelty. Between vocal items the "northern triplepipes" virtuoso Barnaby Brown improvised on 13th-century Celtic chants. Don't ask me how he managed to walk round, while keeping three wooden tubes buzzing in his mouth and conjuring elaborate two-part counterpoints over a drone. But it was amazingly compelling, in an odd way.

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