

CONCERT 21st Sep 2020

Dear WHO and friends,

There is a greater sense of optimism in the air this week with numbers of positive cases steadily falling. After peaking to friends in the UK and in the USA, it is clear that we are very fortunate with our low rate of infections compared to the devastating numbers overseas.

Today I would direct you to a fabulous concert of music by the master film music composer John Williams. Entitled "John Williams in Vienna", it can be found on the SBS streaming service or, if you don't have a smart TV, you can find sections on YouTube. This concert is a compilation, a smorgasbord of material from many of his movie scores spanning nearly 50 years. What a workout for the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, magnificently filmed with surround sound and featuring one of the world's great orchestras in wonderful form. If you have a TV with a good sound system sit back and immerse yourself in over two hours of magnificent music making, which should be to any orchestral player, a real masterclass experience. You can find it, and I don't know for how long, on "SBS on demand". Log in if you haven't an account, it is free. In each half the featured soloist is the world famous German violinist Anne Sophie Mutter performing brilliant quasi concerto-like transcripts of Williams' scores. The orchestra is at full strength, with especially wonderful playing by their legendary Principal Flute, Walter Auer, performing on his gold flute, and brilliant solos on the French horn by their equally famous first horn, Ronald Janezic.

The horns feature prominently in John Williams' scores to which I can attest, having conducted the original score of Star Wars and others on many occasions. This concert is a real workout for the brass generally. No more so than the horn section performing with that distinctive Vienna Philharmonic sound due to the use of Viennese horns which differ from the French horn used in orchestras elsewhere. The Vienna horn uses a unique form of double cylinder valve known as a puppenvalve. Suffice it to say it allows the air to flow straight and is one of many contributing factors that lead to the Vienna Phil. horn's famous liquid legato sound. The tone is more like a natural horn, the players also using a natural horn mouthpiece, which is less concave. Production of low notes is harder and the response is slower but in this orchestra the Viennese horns have remained virtually unchanged since the mid-19th century. This is just one component of the orchestra's unique sound, where the oboe is slightly different and the timpani and triangles are specially constructed.

John Williams was born on the 8th of February 1932, studied at the famous Julliard Music School in New York and initially worked as a jazz pianist and studio musician. He composed music for many TV shows and over a 100 movie scores, with his career really taking off in the early 1970s. The winner of five Academy awards and numerous nominations, he still has great stamina at 87 as is witnessed by his performance in this concert. The orchestra, soloist and audience obviously adore him.

The newspaper "Der Standard" described the audience reaction in this 2019 concert thus: "He was hailed by a standing cheering ovation as if he was a god being welcomed by his earthly followers, but John Williams truly is film music's god".

Anne Sophie Mutter of course is one of the most revered musicians in the world. One of the great experiences of watching this concert is to watch and hear her sublime performance. She was born in 1963 and, like Jacqueline du Pré, studied music full time from an early age. Herbert von Karajan, a great admirer of Anne, arranged for her to perform with the Berlin Philharmonic. She was only 13, and appeared at the Lucerne Festival playing the Mozart Concerto Number 4 in D Major. At 15 she made her first recording of the Mozart violin concertos numbers 3 and 5, with the same orchestra and Karajan. From this amazing beginning she has continued a stellar career playing with the world's best, in many forms. As well as concerti, some of which have been written for her specifically, her sonata and unaccompanied performances are also of the highest quality. At 57 she is still in constant demand around the world. Anne was diagnosed positive with COVID-19 earlier this year. I'm sure the musical world hopes she makes a full recovery. The filming and sound in this concert

is of such a quality that violinists, especially, could learn so much by watching it. Even for all instrumentalists, her performance is an absolute masterclass.

Anne Sophie Mutter owns two Stradivarius violins amongst others. They are the “Emiliani” made in Cremona in 1703 and the “Lord Dunn-Rover” 1710. (The famous Stradivarius instruments all have names along with their multi-million dollar price tags.) I have looked up photos of the “Emiliani Strad.” and I believe it to be the instrument Sophie Mutter is performing on in this performance.

Some of the pieces performed on this recording which have also been released on disc this year include: The Flight to Neverland, Excerpts from Close Encounters, Theme from Jurassic Park, Suite from Jaws, music from Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Schindler’s List and more.

There are a couple of ads but they are tastefully placed so one can turn off the sound and get a cup of tea. This is for music lovers of all ages. Enjoy.

Next week, we will visit the early 18th century around the time the great Stradivarius violins were being made, and also the Vivaldi Four Seasons, “le quattro stagioni”, which I have been researching recently.