

JOHN BARRY MEMORIAL CONCERT – ROYAL ALBERT HALL – MONDAY 20TH JUNE 2011

Tickets for this concert had virtually sold out the day they went on sale apart from the odd seat; and from day one the guest list got longer and longer. With so many people being involved in Barry's long and illustrious career it was great to see some of these coming forward to make their tributes on the night.

After a brief warm-up from the orchestra Sir Michael Parkinson came on stage to introduce us to the man he had known since he was a Granada TV presenter in Manchester in the early 60s - where the John Barry Seven were guests on his show. He said 'his output was monumental both in quantity and in quality' and described John as 'a great man of music' and someone who had 'an intuitive understanding of how to create the perfect union of music and the moving image'. Many images of John were projected onto a large screen throughout the evening, interspersed with footage and interviews from the BBC Omnibus programme from 2000 ('John Barry – Licence To Thrill') and 'Moviola' a PBS TV Special from 1993. Michael introduced us to John's son Jonpatrick who only had a few, but very charming, words to say: 'Welcome to my father's memorial. I'd like to introduce our conductor Nicholas Dodd. Have a wonderful night'. This was the first time I had seen Jonpatrick in person since the comeback concert in 1998 and I was amazed at how tall he now was.

Dodd, who had conducted Barry's music for many of his later concerts, raised his baton for 'Goldfinger' – performed to perfection by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. 'The Knack' followed – a theme which we had first heard performed in concert at the 1998 event. This was another splendid performance followed by a video tribute from one of Barry's earliest and best friends – Sir Michael Caine, who couldn't attend in person due to work commitments. Naturally he recalled the time in the 60s when he was looking for somewhere to live short-term and John had invited him to stay at his flat. In the event Caine was kept awake with John playing on the piano all night. On questioning John the next morning he learnt that he had finished what was the score to Goldfinger. Caine said 'I was the first person in the world *ever* to hear Goldfinger, and I heard it all night'. He described John as 'one of the all-time greats'. He went on to say that Barry was 'one of my closest and oldest friends and a nice guy'; and that he was important in his early career, writing the music for his early films 'Zulu' and 'Ipcress File' - and it was these two themes that followed Caine's tribute. 'Zulu', in particular, was just as 'stirring' as was when John conducted back in 1998. He finished with a very moving statement saying that the last time he was at the RAH it was 'in a concert tribute to John and his music, and I introduced him; and now I'm here in the same place; sort of saying goodbye'.

Sir Richard Attenborough featured amidst some clips and music from 'Chaplin' and some black and white stills of John with Dickie and Jonpatrick as a child. Sadly none of the music from the film - which received an Oscar nomination - was played on the night. Nicholas Dodd then conducted 'Somewhere in Time' and clips from 'Lion in Winter'; and 'Omnibus' with Dr. Francis Jackson discussing this score with John followed.

Don Black OBE then came on stage to voice his comments about his long association with John which had started as early as 1965 when they collaborated on 'Thunderball'. He recalled how he 'remembered the lunches more than the songs' and how John used to like 'fish & chips with a little vinegar on the side'; and 'swam every morning to Mahler's 5th symphony'. It was great to hear him say, yet again, that John had always remained a Yorkshire man through and through despite living in America for almost forty years; and that he felt that 'John always put the York in New York'. It was very poignant when he remarked: 'Unfortunately, outside of the Bond world you only live once'. Nicholas Dodd then conducted their song 'Born Free' which won two Oscars in 1966.

'Midnight Cowboy' followed, with a delightful harmonica solo by Julian Jackson and the penultimate tune in the first half was 'The John Dunbar Theme' from another Oscar-winning score 'Dances with Wolves' – which followed some brief clips from the film and comments on the score and film from John. Dodd announced that John had handed him the baton a few years back before a concert of his music in Paris and to end the first half of the concert he introduced Rumer as 'one of the country's finest new talents' - who sang 'We Have All the Time in the World' to good applause; and the first half of the concert drew to a close. From the BBC Radio 2 'Friday Night Is Music Night' broadcast in 1st July it was revealed by the singer herself that she was invited to sing at the concert because she was in the process of putting words to music John had written just before he died.

After the usual interval Michael Parkinson introduced the first two selections of the second half to highlight John's influence in jazz. Firstly – one of my favourites – 'Body Heat' with the saxophone solo played by Nigel Hitchcock. Another fine performance of one of my favourite Barry themes previously heard in concert form. So too was the second theme 'Remembering Chet' from 'Playing By Heart' which first featured in his 1999 concert with Chris Botti on trumpet. On this occasion the trumpet solo was played by Derek Watkins who, as we later learnt from the Radio 2 broadcast, had played on all of the Bond scores and had worked with Barry since 1965.

One of my favourites on the night - splendidly played by the RPO was 'Out of Africa', followed by another standout track from 1998 and the title of his new album at that time 'The Beyondness of Things'. The only non-Barry tune on the evening's programme was 'Ave Marie'. As Nicholas Dodd explained this was a personal favourite of John's and the song was superbly sung by Wynne Evans deputising for Alfie Boe who was unable to attend. This selection was very popular with the audience.

The next item was a surprise – clips relating to Eternal Echoes (from the BBC 'Omnibus' special) followed by a reading of the 'Blessing by John Donoghue' by Bond actor Timothy Dalton. He explained that Laurie had asked him to read this as John had it permanently on his desk whilst he was working; and he described John as 'a kind and generous man, warm and funny'. It would have been nice to hear a concert version of 'The Living Daylights' for the first time but, as expected, this was not to be.

Current Bond composer David Arnold was the next guest who – along with John's widow Laurie – had organised the evening's concert. David came on with his guitar with which I'd recently seen him backing Shirley Bassey. He said 'I heard John Barry and I wanted to be a film composer'. He went on to say 'it's terribly difficult at saying goodbye to someone like John because he's been such a huge part in everyone's lives; but in a way he is here – he's in the first violins, he's in the horns, he's in the trumpets and I think he's definitely in the bar somewhere'. This raised a huge laugh and what followed was a real treat as David premiered a song which was the last song to be composed by John – 'Tick the Days Off One By One'. Extremely well-sung, this was a great number and one wondered who and what it had been originally written for.

Before I could catch my breathe the RPO began 'The James Bond Suite'. I have to say that, although I have heard this many times before, as it was always included in Barry's concerts, Dodd gave it his all and the RPO were superb and faultless; and this time the suite was far raunchier. Dodd enjoyed it as much as the crowd and proved this by holding up the score booklet during the rapturous applause at the end commenting 'marvellous stuff!'

After what seemed like a never-ending applause Sir George Martin was then introduced. I'd half expected another video link but was pleased to see a somewhat frail looking Martin come onto stage to recall the early days of John and the John Barry Seven; and his technique of using the violins and pizzicato strings. He said 'John Barry's a pretty hard act to follow' and 'had an unerring instinct for what a film needed'. For instance, he would ask for twelve French horns, all playing the same phrase, and when told this was extravagant he replied 'sure, but it's a great sound'. Soon after the audience exploded into applause as George introduced Dame Shirley Bassey as 'probably the greatest dramatic singer of all time'. What followed was simply the best version of 'Diamonds Are Forever' sung by Shirley that I'd ever heard and I think the rest of arena agreed.

But even better things followed when Shirley and her conductor launched into 'Goldfinger' which received a standing ovation; and bouquets of flowers and presents from members of the audience and John's grand-daughters were presented to Shirley. A stupendous performance – surely the finest yet – from 74 year old Shirley. John would have been proud of her.

The final item was yet another surprise and this was a tremendous version of the James Bond Theme with Dodd conducting the RPO accompanied by David Arnold on guitar. Ok, he's no Vic Flick but David can play superbly and his second tribute for the evening was accompanied by images of some of the Bond movies on the screen.

To end the evening's concert Laurie Barry – John's 'driving force' was introduced. She confirmed that the RPO had been 'perfect', and thanked everyone for 'being here for John'. She went on to thank all the artists and deep inside I felt pleased, and relieved, that she didn't just take a back seat as before but had made herself present. After all, it was Laurie – with help from David Arnold and Eon Productions who we have to thank for the concert which was in aid of The John Barry Scholarship for Film Composition recently set up at the Royal College of Music. She was soon joined by Jonpatrick who, if I remember correctly, entered with a bouquet of flowers. I'd only ever seen Laurie once in person and that was at the Symphony Hall in Birmingham where John performed in 1999 – she sat a few rows behind us and we later presented her with a leather bound copy of our 1998 book to pass onto John.

Having to dash off to ensure I was in good time for my last train I quickly left knowing that I had, without question, thoroughly enjoyed the evening. I would have loved to have dashed down to meet Laurie and thank her but trains do not wait! So I'd like to take this opportunity of thanking all concerned for arranging such a splendid tribute to my hero John Barry.

Gareth Bramley – July 2011

