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Front Page (<http://www.amati.com/magazine/>)

News (<http://www.amati.com/magazine/category/152-news/>)

Comment (<http://www.amati.com/magazine/category/149-comment/>)

Blog (<http://www.amati.com/magazine/category/150-blog/>)

Reviews (<http://www.amati.com/magazine/category/148-cd-concert-reviews/>)

Interviews (<http://www.amati.com/magazine/category/153-interviews/>)

Articles (<http://www.amati.com/magazine/category/107-instrument-articles/>)



CREMONAFIERE
September 30th , October 1st-2nd , 2016
Cremona Exhibition Centre

(<http://www.cremonamondomusica.it/en/>)

CONCERT REVIEW: Camerata Alma Viva

Conway Hall, London, 20 September 2015

★★★★☆



(<http://www.amati.com/magazine/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Camerata-Alma-Viva.jpg>)

Camerata Alma Viva in rehearsal: an extrovert young ensemble determined to do things differently

The evening began not with the advertised Mozart Divertimento, but a softly hummed D, spreading through the Conway Hall as the 16 musicians of Camerata Alma Viva walked down the aisles. Soon an A natural joined it, then an F sharp, and maybe a few naughty sixths as well, as the audience was encouraged to join in, the wooden floor and walls which make Conway Hall London's finest acoustic for chamber music adding their own gentle resonance. Now assembled beneath the stage, they played a Schnittke-like cadenza on the long-promised D major tonic as an upbeat to the divertimento's first chord, which became a satisfying arrival point in its own right, and yet proved the springboard for a performance of

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- Front Page
(<http://www.amati.com/magazine>)
- News

startling weight within the framework of a controlled, Classical style. K.136 is hardly Mozart's most profound work, and yet its how-d'you-do themes and linking scales to nowhere took on an expressive weight out of all proportion to their origins.

It was clear by now that this group of mostly French, UK-based musicians like to do things differently. More Mozart followed: the Sinfonia concertante which is among his first works of unassailable genius, and yet not in the usual scoring for violin, viola and orchestra, but a democratic, strings-only version made by one of the group's violinists, Eric Mouret, taking as its basis the composer's own sextet arrangement for domestic consumption. Thus not only the leader Charlotte Maclet and first-desk violist Florian Perret swapped the soloist's dialogue between them, but also their colleagues, and even cellist Matheiu Foubert was given a piece of the action. The opening tutti was as vibrant as the divertimento had been, with playing of unfettered energy yet impressive discipline, neat and spruce without Mannheim manners and exaggerated dynamics, making the most convincing case I've yet seen for the present fashion of standing up to play.

Tuning slipped a little during the movement's central action, and it was a performance which prized harmonious agreement less than the individual personalities of its actors. Perret plays almost chin off, Maclet uses a light and high bow-hold, yet others behind them are less wedded to historically informed notions of articulation and projection, so that vibrato came and went and the slow movement was less of a meeting of minds than usual and more of a jointly undertaken search for resolution.

The first half was played to a backdrop of 'live' painting which only became distracting after the interval. The Chamber Symphony fashioned by Rudolf Barshai from the Eighth String Quartet of Shostakovich became

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CONCERT REVIEW:

paradoxically more charged with intensity yet its tragic narrative subverted by falling canvases and hapless antics on stage, to which the Camerata responded with steely concentration. Perhaps if all had gone to plan, the first performance of Mouret's concluding fantasia on a Rolling Stones number, *Paint it Black*, would have felt more like a culmination than an afterthought, but the abiding memory was of an extrovert young ensemble (founded in 2009) with not only the confidence to beat out new paths but also the talent and tonal refinement to bring listeners with them.

23rd September 2015 (<http://www.amati.com/magazine/148-cd-concert-reviews/concert-review-camerata-alma-viva/>) Peter Quantrill (<http://www.amati.com/magazine/author/pquantrill/>)

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