

## **Review: 'And Then They Wrote.....'**

If, like me, you have some Michael Flanders (1922-75) and Donald Swann (1923-94) vinyl amongst your vintage collection of LPs, it is most probably *At the Drop of a Hat* (1956) or *At the Drop of Another Hat* (1963), or you may recall their broadcast renditions of classics like *The Hippopotamus* ('Mud, Mud, Glorious Mud'), *Transport of Delight*, *The Gas Man Cometh* or the famous lament marking the demise of the railway, *Slow Train*. Either way, the latest musical event at All Saints' Weston Longville in December in aid of The Wensum Group of Churches brought back many happy memories of that unique partnership, famous "throughout the civilised world, and America". That the evening utilised relatively few of the obvious F&S 'classics' and introduced us instead to a wide range of their songs and Donald Swann's compositions, some of which have been heard by few audiences since they were written, made the evening an unexpected but delightful voyage of discovery, with the musical items interwoven seamlessly with a lively and informative commentary and amusing anecdotes by the renowned baritone and archivist for the Donald Swann Estate, Leon Berger.

Leon's superb vocal, presentation and acting skills were very well matched by the classically-trained mezzo-soprano Rachel Duffield, Cassie Tillett (soprano), Selwyn Tillett (baritone) and Martyn Shults (tenor), all of whom sang with great clarity of diction and expression. Robert Osborne on clarinet produced a delightful tone, and Selwyn Tillett as accompanist was sensitive to the varied moods and tempi of the music on offer.

The evening was billed as 'an evening of fun & nostalgia', and we were certainly not disappointed. Leon's rendition of *The Sloth* and Rachel's *A Question of Convenience* were especially memorable, there were some appropriately seasonal items in *The Ballad of Figgy Duff* and *Christmas Candle*, and *There's a Hole in my Budget* was tweaked to bring it in line with the current financial situation. Despite the venue, two slightly more risqué items *Guide to Britten* and *Rockall* were performed with the agreement of the Rural Dean.

F&S are well-known to most people for perhaps a dozen or so comic songs with characteristic wit, gentle satire, complex rhyming schemes, and memorable choruses, but the evening demonstrated that these are but the tip of a substantial musical iceberg. The benefice was very fortunate indeed to have an opportunity to explore this in greater depth with such a fine group of musicians in this *Vocal Score's* latest production.

DG