

Mark Kaplan, violin

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Kirklees Orchestral Concerts, Elgar, Walton, Vaughan Williams: Mark Kaplan (violin), Orchestra of Opera North, Paul Watkins (conductor), Huddersfield Town Hall, 15.2. 2006 (P Se)

Elgar: Froissart,

Walton: Violin Concerto,

Vaughan Williams: Symphony No. 5.

I was once told that a critic is never happier than when he's slating some hapless performance. If that's true, it'll explain why, the day after one of the most unexpectedly satisfying concerts I've attended in a long time, I'm feeling so fed up! ,,,

Dark forces are confined to the occasional passing cloud in Walton's amorous and amicable concerto, which brought a welcome Mediterranean warmth to a chilly Huddersfield evening. Mark Kaplan proved a near-ideal foil to Paul Watkin, being similarly undemonstrative (I observed with some relief) and equally effective. His 1685 Strad, resonant beneath, seductively throaty in the middle, and with a top as sweet as a nut, seemed made for this music, although, of course, it's the other way round.

Kaplan had his feet well under the table of Walton's work, so to speak, projecting the singing lines with bags of passion, well up to the second movement's "Paganini" trickery, and lacing its rudely folksy tune with what seemed like the best part of a bottle of Chianti. In the finale, he managed a pretty fair impression of a suitor serenading beneath a lady's balcony. However, when the music is played so romantically, those elaborate, virtuosic "twiddly bits" - which I suspect are what Heifetz stuck in to make it harder to play - do become unnecessarily intrusive. Could somebody, please, make so bold as to take them out again?

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Paul Serotsky