Rebecca Sharp: Harp & Poetry @ La Soiree Concert Series

Reviewed by Clair Hope January 2011

It's Friday the 28th of January 2011 and I'm carefully weaving my way through the backstreets of Manchester, searching for the Town Hall Tavern. With my mobile glued inches from my nose I feel a bit like challenge Anika as I follow each text direction on my treasure hunt for the pub. As I take a left at Odd bins and keep my eyes peeled for the next marker, I am excited but also slightly nervous to reach my ultimate destination, which is in fact Cross Street Unitarian Chapel; the pub I'm heading for is merely a rendezvous point to meet my chums.

Our final destination is of a more rare and elusive nature. You could say we are in store for a bit of culture, and not a religious ceremony as the mention of attending **Cross Street Unitarian Chapel** might suggest. We are in fact attending one of a series of concerts or La Soiree's as they are titled being organised and hosted by Your Event Musicians, with tonight's performance being a recital on the Celtic

Harp by a lady called Rebecca Sharp.

As I reach the pub and take a seat with my beer and bacon frazzles, I'm helpfully reminded by my brain that my knowledge of classical music is limited to certain films, adverts for cigars called Hamlet and a rather pitiful looking classical relaxation cd, which sits uncomfortably between my collections of cheesy pop and other music specifically designed for anything but relaxation. I also have no idea if tonight's genre of music can even be described as 'classical', I have never been to a recital before and I have never seen a Harp being played in the flesh. As soon as I ponder these thoughts, my mind is filled with images of huge orchestras, grand concert halls and haughty stiff-upper lip types, who would sneer at my converse trainers and secret love of Britney Spears; I'm starting to wonder if this is such a good idea after all. However, before the twitchy urge to flee takes hold I am joined by my friends and it is time to head to the recital.

Situated across the road from and nearby to Thomas's Chop House, Cross Street Unitarian Chapel itself is one of those places that I have walked past for years but never really noticed. As we entered into the foyer we were greeted with a complimentary glass of wine and a programme then steered through a set of double doors into the main hall. I have to say that I was completely taken aback by the Church's inner sanctum. Interesting in itself from an architectural point of view as it is a round room the effect was magnified because it had been lit with candles and soft lamplight, with the seating area arranged around several neat little tables in a semi-circle in front of the performance area. This resulted in the setting resembling a beautifully romantic and intimate bistro, rather than your average concert arrangement.

Some of my favourite pieces from the evening included:

‘**Good Animals**’ - A gorgeous instrumental piece that had me imagining autumnal days, filled with carpets of swirling golden leaves, as I walked through parks among beams of sunlight that streamed through tree branches, a soft brown hazy world, slightly out of focus. Watching contentedly as laughing children and playful dogs skipped through leaf piles, with armfuls thrown into the air and laughter filling the quiet.

‘**Stars Got Stuck**’ – A beautiful ad thought provoking piece of spoken word accompanied by music from the harp. In stars got stuck Rebecca leads you through the urban city of Glasgow but with her vision you see it as never before. Her eye for beauty transforms the mundane and ugly into magical and sentimental objects, such as the chewing gum on the pavement that is turned into something tender and magical as it is shaped like a heart and becomes a piece of art. Or the tarmac that twinkles in the moonlight, making it appear to be a concrete river that captured the stars and turned them to stone. The whole piece is hauntingly beautiful and full of

nostalgia. It reminds me very much of the rose tinted spectacles of love, which leads you to see the world with fresh eyes.

‘**Landing Light**’ – A piece that sounded slightly tribal and almost ritualistic. It conjured a vision in my mind of Celtic priestesses and Druids dancing round a stone henge like structure. Moving hypnotically, swaying entranced as flower petals are delicately strewn around the place. The music seemed tinged with a slight sadness, making me think that perhaps they were burying a great warrior king and that their tears and commemoration were intended to send the hero off to a great journey in the afterlife. Flaxen haired maidens, with hair bound in golden thread stoke perfumed pyres and dance like the flames to celebrate their great leader.

Rebecca made it easy to become involved in her music, so that you almost felt part of the performance and the magic of the evening, rather than just a spectator. Her warm and personable nature was welcoming and unpretentious. Particularly enjoyable were her explanations of the meanings and inspirations for each piece, such as the plane journey through a lightning storm that inspired The Giants are welding, and the journeys across Western to Eastern Scotland that inspired the stirring and nostalgic Effort and Treasure.

The whole evening was magical, set in a fantastic venue, welcoming, intimate and with perfect acoustics to showcase the music. As well as being an absolute bargain for money, the La Soiree concerts are making rare forms of music accessible and are a treat to be taken advantage of and enjoyed. I would recommend the next upcoming events in the La Soiree series, as well as the music of Rebecca Sharp to all. You may at first presume that this kind of recital or music may not be your cup of tea, however if you love music I would urge you to give it a listen; if you are anything like me the tinkling melodies will have you remembering happy days from the past as well as imagining mystical and intriguing thoughts. If entertainment is designed to provide light relief from our daily lives, the music of Rebecca Sharp certainly achieves that; you cannot help but be drawn into her world of imagination and creativity.

In summary, it was a thoroughly enjoyable evening, which made me feel both proud and blessed to be living in a city that values such culture and artistic talent. Thanks to Your Event Musicians, Manchester has had the rare pleasure of experiencing the talent of Rebecca Sharp, whom made the journey from her home in Liverpool especially. Without their passion for music and musicians, such a treasure may not have been seen.

Click on this Rebecca Sharp link to visit her website where you will also find copies of her album ' **The Mystery Workshop**' and her performance piece '**The Ballad of Juniper Davy**
' and '
Sonny Lumiere
' available to buy. Click on this
 La Soiree
link to see further details on upcoming events, where you can also purchase tickets for them.

A review by Yvonne Cawley of the first performance in this La Soiree Concert Series can be read by clicking on this Diaspora link, and by Charlotte Starkey of the second performance in the series can be read by clicking on this
Piano and Poetry
link.