

**SARA DEBORAH & FRIENDS**

**14 – 16 March 2019**

**Wellhayes Vineyard (Devon), Bridport Arts Centre (Dorset)**

**Ilminster Arts Centre (Somerset), Creative Innovation Centre Taunton**

**Sara Deborah and Friends** provided a programme of innovative delights for their listeners in the second mini-tour of Concerts in the West’s current season. There was much to savour from their mix of baroque and early romantic repertoire.

For many in the audiences, Johan Löfving’s theorbo, an enlarged lute and an instrument originating from the first years of the seventeenth century, would have been their first sighting and hearing of what proved to be a very versatile instrument played with great skill and dedication. Sara Deborah Timossi, violin, and Lucy Scotchmer, cello, were very welcome returnees to this, the 14th season of Concerts in the West tours. All three shared with us a wonderfully balanced programme, rich in diversity of styles and detail and a complete feeling of shared empathy and mutual respect for their roles within each piece.

The programme began with Biber’s Sonata in A, a daring and virtuosic choice for Sara Deborah and a piece that laid down a no-holds bar to the total commitment of all three performers. The Boismoitier Trio Sonata that followed brought a greater equilibrium between the violin and cello with both players projecting fine tonal quality in their melodic conversations. Johan Löfving’s account of an all too rare solo piece for the theorbo, *Ciaconna* by the early 17th century German-Italian composer and virtuoso lutenist, Kapsberger, proved enormously popular with the audiences, and considering the skill asked for, rightly so. Tartini’s G minor Sonata (‘Didone Abbandonata’) took us into the realms of quasi-opera with Sara Deborah Timossi’s aria-like involvement in the different moods of the three movements. In her exquisite playing and sympathetic demeanour, it was possible to grasp Timossi’s chosen lyrics and to concur with her.

The Tartini work seemed naturally to lead us into a later period of romantic lyricism after the interval. The theorbo was replaced with a nineteenth century version of the guitar, smaller in size and more mellifluous than the modern acoustic version. Löfving’s handling of this instrument was no less assured than that of his theorbo playing and found its greatest expression in the beautiful Paganini *Cantabile* for violin and guitar and an arrangement by the French guitarist, Porro, of an extract from Mozart’s Opus 1 E minor violin sonata. In the final work of the programme, Giuliani’s opus 19 *Serenade,* the friends came together in a work written by a composer well-versed in the technical and expressive potentials of all three instruments. Giuliani, himself a cellist], would not have been more delighted with the well-judged tonal nuances and excellent intonation that Lucy Scotchmer produced in this work.

In addition to very pleasurable performances, the audiences much enjoyed the concise and illuminating introductions given by the trio to both music and instruments.

Andrew Maddocks 2019