

Music

Review: David Garrett plays The Four Seasons

Musical fireworks at The Hampton Court Palace Festival

The Four Seasons, Hampton Court Palace Festival - 6th June 2009

It's hard to imagine a more quintessentially English way to spend a summer evening than picnicking in palace gardens before a performance from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. It's one of the reasons why The Hampton Court Palace festival, now in its 17th year, has become a cultural highlight in the musical calendar. Unfortunately, Saturday night's weather wasn't quite so summery, but the audience were still English so the picnicking carried on regardless - just with extra blankets.

The evening's classical indulgences began with a spirited performance of Bach's Orchestral Suite No.3 and Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks - minus the actual fireworks due to high winds, but conductor Benjamin Bayl ensured that the musica more than made up for it. Though the stage is in the open air, the courtyard provides perfect concert acoustics and the sound here (excusing some harmonizing birdsong and the odd low-flying plane) is surprisingly good.

Temperatures dropped for the second half, but the atmosphere soon warmed up as virtuoso violinist David Garrett took to the stage for an outstanding performance of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. Born in Aachen, Garrett made his debut at the age of 10 with the Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra, and has since played to world-wide acclaim on the classical circuit while releasing two successful crossover albums of his own arrangements.

It comes as no surprise, then, that he plays Vivaldi like a dream, inspiring the crowd at Hampton Court to applaud louder with every movement until at the end there was nothing to do but stamp their feet for an encore. It was a well-earned reception for an unusually generous soloist: Garrett brings humour and charm to his art, engaging with his audience and fellow musicians as though the perfect sound is worthless unless everyone's involved.

There was an electric energy on stage, with some beautiful interaction between lead members of the orchestra. The seasons played out to a spectacular lighting scheme after dark and the cold wind, though harsh on violinists' fingers, only seemed to add to the drama. It's a treat to find a classical concert that's as good to watch as it is to listen to - and the Hampton Court Palace festival isn't over yet.

Carla Evans - June 2009