



ATTIVA ORA

# Spira Mirabilis/Kate Royal, Queen Elizabeth Hall, SE1 - review

Meticulously prepared performances and in control in the absence of a conductor

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Barry Millington

06 December 2012  
Critic Rating ☆☆☆

Reader Rating

The top-class players of Spira Mirabilis have made a name for themselves with vibrant presentations of varied repertoire. Their meticulously prepared performances of a single work, played without a conductor, seek to engage audiences with an innovative approach.

Last night's concert was certainly unusual in format. In the first half, Spira Mirabilis played Schubert's Octet in F for winds and strings; in the second they left the field to Kate Royal for a group of Schubert lieder with accompanist Malcolm Martineau.

In Schubert's Octet, for which you wouldn't expect a conductor anyway, the problem of the opening entry was solved by no fewer than five of the players giving an upbeat with emphatic twists of the torso. Whom the other three followed is anybody's guess. An ensemble of leaders, then, and very fine players they are too, enhancing Schubert's mellifluous melodies with subtle nuances and superbly crafted phrasing. It would have been interesting to have heard what connections the programme planners intended to make between the Octet, a good-humoured work yet dating from the composer's final illness-darkened years, and the selection of songs after the interval.

There were no comments from the platform, however; nor were translations provided for the songs, so not much audience engagement there either. With Martineau sensitive as ever at the keyboard, Royal delivered a sequence of songs including such favourites as An Silvia, An die Musik and Im Frühling, with her customary charm and elegance.

Altogether an evening of considerable accomplishment but not quite the exceptional experience promised.

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