

Dvorak Cello Concerto

Tully Potter in "The Strad", September 2004

Rohan de Saram (cello)

Thames Philharmonia

Viswas Subbaraman (conductor)

St.John's, Smith Square, London 15th May 2004-08-22

Those who missed the great Sri Lankan-born cellist Rohan de Saram playing the Dvorak Concerto - his participation was announced rather late - can count themselves unlucky.

This was not only a moving and involving performance. It was the kind of thing one hears very seldom in our pre-packaged, clingfilm-covered modern concert life. Here was a man, renowned for his involvement with contemporary music, showing how well he comprehended every aspect of a late Romantic masterpiece.

His interpretation was founded on two key elements: portamento and what the Germans call *Innigkeit* (inwardness). Dvorak expected his Cello Concerto to be played with the essential slides in place and de Saram obliged with generous but always musically apt portamentos, creating larger phrases out of smaller phrases so that each movement hung together as an entity.

Yet every note in the finale was clean as a whistle when it needed to be. This was technique used as it should be, to aid understanding rather than to show off skill. The poignant statement of the song towards the end, inserted by the composer in memory of his beloved sister-in-law, was one of those moments where all the clocks seem to stop.

But the entire reading was full of such moments, when de Saram held back his tone until it became fined down to an almost unbearable tension and our rapt concentration was suspended by the merest thread. Few soloists have the courage or the means to achieve this effect, or the rhythmic control to make it work in context.