

**REVIEW**

## Renaissance woman

*Tasmin Little Plays Vivaldi's Four Seasons, Orchestra of the Swan at the Play House, 5th February*

THERE was an air of excited anticipation among the packed audience at Stratford Play House on Tuesday evening. The great violinist Tasmin Little, *pictured*, was about to come on stage for what was almost certain to be her last performance in the town.

Less than a fortnight earlier Tasmin had announced that she would be retiring from the concert platform next year to concentrate on other projects, especially in the field of education.

She has exceptionally strong links with Stratford. Her mother was born and brought up in the town and Tasmin has been artistic director three times of local music festivals involving the Orchestra of the Swan. It is therefore hardly surprising that there was a special poignancy about Tuesday's concert.

As is usual with this extraordinarily gifted violinist, she gave the audience a plentiful supply of richly rewarding musical energy and enthusiasm — performing in no fewer than three of the four works being presented that evening.

In what was clearly designed to whet the appetite for what was to come, the Orchestra of the Swan began with the *Concerto Grosso in D minor, RV 565* by Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) in which the orchestra's artistic director, violinist David Le Page, was director.

This little concerto alone dispels the jibe — often attributed to

Igor Stravinsky — that Vivaldi did not write 500 concertos but wrote the same concerto 500 times! Lovers of Vivaldi can easily point to the subtlety and ingenuity of the composer's cleverly constructed writing for string instruments to counter this claim.

Tasmin made her first appearance at this concert as the soloist and director of a work called *Fratres*, written in 1977 by the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (born 1935). The piece — which translated into English means 'Brothers' — is a set of variations based on a six-bar theme that becomes more hauntingly fascinating as it progresses.

Apart from demonstrating an immediate and intense rapport with this particular orchestra, it was also obvious that Tasmin was very familiar with this work. (Her 1994 recording of it with pianist Martin Roscoe



formed part of the soundtrack of the 1996 film *Mother Night*, starring Nick Nolte.)

She then joined David Le Page as co-soloist and director of the ever popular *Concerto for Two Violins, BWV 1043* by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). More commonly known as Bach's *Double Concerto*, the work is a delicious master-piece by the man the cellist Pablo Casals described as 'The God of Music'. Its glorious tunefulness — in all three movements, especially the central largo — is sufficient to guarantee its continuing position as a much-favoured specimen of Baroque musicianship. (And, interestingly — whatever Stravinsky might have said — Bach was an admirer of Vivaldi!)

The final work was Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, one of the greatest works for solo violin and string orchestra in the entire repertoire. In this, Tasmin was able to display her great virtuosity to stunning effect in a performance of superb bravura — and with an orchestra that was well up to the exacting standards demanded by an artist of such technical brilliance and interpretative genius.

Explaining before the performance that the concerto was really a set of poems — which she then described in often comic detail — she gave early warning, if one were needed, of the communication skills she'll be using in her next career.

Is she Renaissance Woman? She certainly has all the qualities....

**Preston Witts**