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by Maggie Cotton

THE ORCHESTRA OF ST JOHN  
St John's Church, Bromsgrove  
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Local music making at its very best, an orchestra created only last year from musicians living within about 15 miles of the fine venue of St John's church, Bromsgrove. Surprisingly for such a large space with very high ceiling, the acoustics are excellent, highlighting some fine playing from this modestly-sized orchestra.

A conventional and familiar programme welcomed the enthusiastic audience, starting with Mozart's Don Giovanni overture. Conductor Richard Jenkinson (whose 'day job' is that of cello principal in the CBSO) certainly made his presence felt with unnecessary extravagant gyrations when fronting his musicians, from tiger crouches to wild flagellating windmilling. However, this appeared to do the trick as some lovely playing was forthcoming in spite of the maestro threatening to get in the way of the actual music.

Pianist Benjamin Frith joined the merry throng in Beethoven's Concerto no 3. A lively dialogue was forthcoming between orchestra and splendid soloist, although more lyricism could have been allowed from fine woodwinds. Neat entries and good balance all round with fearless tutti lead to a fiery cadenza. One could truly imagine Beethoven himself in the hot seat. Timpani were somewhat over-exuberant in the final throes, but otherwise all was splendid.

And finally the meat course. Beethoven's Eroica Symphony. A spanking pace unnerved the intonation a little but everyone soon settled to give of their all. Some lovely woodwinds, particularly oboe and flute solo strands, offset rich brass and heroic horns, creating imaginative drama and inspired playing throughout.