

Youth festival shines in the Easter sunlight

By Amy Keen

THE curtain may have fallen on this year's Harrogate International Youth Festival, but it went out with a bang following a well-attended Grand Finale at The Royal Hall on Wednesday night.

The 38th Festival managed to conquer the challenges posed by a late Easter Break and the draw of excellent weather to put on almost a full week of hugely successful events. Performers

new and old delighted in performing to the crowds in some of the arena's most stunning venues including The Royal Hall, Fountains Abbey and Newby Hall.

Festival-goers have already passed on their congratulations to organisers ECE Travel for driving the Festival forward.

As the last event of its kind in the UK, this Festival has become a pivotal event on the region's cultural calendar; bringing together international and

local performers for what is considered a must-attend event for many people in the area.

Highlights include the performances of both German groups whose instrumental and vocal talents have blown away audiences, particularly at Tuesday's Choral and Chamber Music event held in the magnificent setting of Ripon Cathedral.

Also not to be forgotten was the show-stealing performance by Scotland's

Vale of Atholl Junior Pipe Band on Easter Weekend, whose precision percussion and pipe work brought Harrogate town centre to a standstill as passers-by took in the Festival's atmosphere in the sunshine.

Organisers ECE have confirmed they have already received more than 200 participant enquiries for next year's event including a marching band from the USA, so watch this space.

Big band night lives up to expectations

Jazz and Big Band Evening, Crown Hotel, Harrogate.

SUNDAY night saw a capacity crowd gather at Harrogate's Crown Hotel for one of the most eagerly awaited concerts of the 38th annual Harrogate International Youth Festival.

A firm favourite with regulars and newcomers alike, the Jazz and Big Band Evening is always a sell-out success and this year's concert did not disappoint.

From Ontario, Canada, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School Jazz ensemble wowed guests with a professional and toe-tapping recital of some jazz favourites including Woodchopper's Ball and Harlem Nocturne.

In their first trip outside

of North America the group proved they were an international talent and could hold the attention of an audience with their professional sound.

Led by Musical Director David Morrison, this set was an ideal start to an upbeat evening.

In a surprising, but exciting break from the traditional Jazz production, the second act, Germany's Schaumburger Jugendchor (Youth Choir) brought the house down with their pitch perfect harmonies. The performance kicked off with the upbeat Blue Skies by Irving Berlin.

In a seven-piece set they also threw in some surprise gospel numbers which although unusual in the context of the evening were welcomed with open arms

by the audience left spellbound by the group's mesmerising and accomplished vocal talent.

The highlight was a rousing rendition of Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel.

In an unexpected addition to the programme, Harrogate Saxophone Quartet Saxophony took to the stage and performed a small-but perfectly formed duo of familiar hits. Song of India was their offering to the night's theme while Lennon and McCartney's When I'm Sixty Four sounded playful and brought more than a few smiles into the crowd.

The final group of the night was local talent, St Aidan's Swing Band. Entering in style to a chest-thumping drum solo from James MacCallum and James Brown on tenor sax,

the group lived up to their 'walk-on' hype with an incredible performance of Nou's Blue.

The set included some incredible vocal accompaniments which have never before been seen in public.

Year 12 student CC Morgan brought the house down with a mature and spine-tingling rendition of Feeling Good (Michael Buble's version).

Katie Skinner's vocals added another dimension to the band's excellent performance of Respect and Michael Earnshaw's successful departure from his usual sax role into vocal soloist on Cry Me a River was a treat.

With standards so high, this event is sure to drive newcomers back to this festival in years to come.

Opening concert is a major triumph

Harrogate International Youth Music Festival Grand Opening Concert, Notes from Around the World, Royal Hall, Harrogate.

WITH both music and performers spanning two continents this concert certainly lived up to its name, Notes from Around the World.

The Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School Concert Band from Ontario, Canada, making its

first tour outside North America, opened the evening with the stately strains of Rimsky-Korsakov's Procession of the Nobles. From Russia we were taken to the USA with Brick Street Encounter whose rousing finish led into Copland's Hoe

Down with a very strong percussion section. The Sir Wilfrid Laurier band then took us back to Canada with Three Folk Miniatures arranged by Andre Jutras. The slow, haunting love song Isabeau's Promene leading to an up tempo finish to the set with Les Raftmen.

The strains of the Vale of Atholl Junior Pipe Band told us that we were in Scotland for the second group. The Pitlochry band was making a welcome return visit having proved to be a popular group last year. Marching on to the stage to Rose of Allandale



The Schwandorf Jugendblaskapelle from Bavaria on stage at the Royal Hall. (S)

the Vale of Atholl played a number of pipe pieces from Lord Lovat's Lament to Highland Cathedral and featured a highland fling by the bass drummer, without drum on this occasion.

All too soon Scotland the Brave and Mairi's Wedding brought an end to the Vale of Atholl's performance.

Harrogate's own Katrina Hughes School of Dance and Performing Arts opened their first section of the evening with the Alexandra Burke number Broken Heels.

Filling the stage in their silver costumes the Katrina Hughes dancers displayed the exuberance that we have come to expect.

The higher seniors then performed a moving piece set to Adele's Someone Like You. A spectacular Pirates of the Caribbean routine by the higher juniors followed.

It is 13 years since the Schwandorf Jugendblaskapelle from Bavaria took part in the Festival. Reflecting the excellent weather we have had the band opened with the concert march Die Sonne

geht auf (The Sun Comes Up).

This was followed by some virtuoso xylophone playing by Andreas Urban in Xylo Classics. Regina Kagerev displayed similar virtuosity in Rocking for Piccolo.

Schwandorf brought the first half to an end with the Rosamunde Polka or Beer Barrel Polka reminding older festival goers of the German evenings that used to be held in the Royal Hall. It is some years since a German group played in the Festival and Schwandorf's excellent performance certainly showed us what we have been missing.

Harrogate's St John Fisher Swing Band was making its first appearance on the main festival stage.

They made a rousing start to the second half of the concert with Harry South's Storm Warning, a piece originally written for local group NYJO. In contrast the bossa nova number Girl from Ipanema had a much more mellow sound before the upbeat Beat It. St John Fisher then gave us a blues number Sweet Home Chicago; a

very successful first main stage appearance by this Harrogate group.

The stage then cleared again for a second set by the Katrina Hughes School of Dance and Performing Arts. A very colourful and energetic version of Robert Randolph's Ain't Nothing Wrong by the juniors was followed by a strict tempo tap routine of I've Got Rhythm by the seniors.

The final performance of the night was given by the St Aidan's Symphonic Wind Band.

Its first piece saw a return to Russia with Khachaturian's Sabre Dance, a showcase piece for both the band and xylophone player Chris Lindsay.

A sharp contrast followed as St Aidan's moved from 76 Trombones to the more lyrical Lux Aurumque by Eric Whitacre...a moving depiction of the Bethlehem stable where Christ was born.

The final item of the night saw St Aidan's build up to a majestic climax in Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral by Richard Wagner.

This was an excellent opening concert to the 38th Festival.

Michael Newby