Horn Trios – 25th February 2007

Concert Review by Lewis Forbes

For the first St. Michael's at Six concert of 2007, Claire Sterling (violin), Neil Mantle (horn) and Gillian Gray (piano), all professional musicians based in Edinburgh, treated the audience to a pair of contrasting horn trios from (relatively) modern composer Lennox Berkeley and Romantic "heavyweight" Brahms.

The evening began with the Berkeley trio – a work which may have confounded some people's preconception's about 20th Century music, as it is crammed full of great melodies! The bright and quirky *Allegro* with its difficult sparse textures and twisted melodic fragments preceded the timeless, modal *Adagio* central movement, which was most beautiful and a highlight of the piece. The third movement (*Theme and Variations*) explored different textures and timbres, even employing some extended techniques such as the bending of pitches on the horn. This movement was rhythmic and fun, and the enjoyment of the players shone through.

The concert continued with as much proficiency and style with the much more famous Brahms Trio in E flat major. In the opening *Andante*, the group really made the most of the full thick textures, and the pastoral, lyrical theme sounded perfectly sublime thanks to Neil Mantle's beautiful legato. The final movement, a very "con brio" *Allegro con brio*, was spirited, playful and full of humour!

Overall, the skill and enthusiasm of the players, combined with a great programme, made this a spectacular opening concert to what will undoubtedly be another successful year for St. Michael's at Six.