

Pavlova Quintet: Holywell Music Room

by Nicola Lisle

The last time I attended a Pavlova Quintet recital at the Holywell, the attendance was pitifully thin. Happily, their supporters turned out in force for their tenth anniversary concert last Friday, and by the time the players walked out to welcoming applause there was hardly a seat unoccupied.

This was, for the quintet, a typically intrepid programme, embracing little-known repertoire from France and Latin-America, which allowed them to showcase their musical dexterity.

South America was represented by close contemporaries Piazzolla, D’Rivera and Medaglia, all inspired by their national dances and, in the case of D’Rivera, the jazz sounds of late 20th-century New York. Piazzolla’s Primavera Porteña explores the different sides of the tango, revealing its angular rhythms and emotional seductiveness, while Brazilian-born Medaglia, in his Belle Époque in South America suite, teams the tango with a waltz and a street dance to produce a pot-pourri of different moods, rhythms and tempi. D’Rivera’s Aires Tropicales combines dance rhythms from Cuba and Venezuela with jazz styles drawn from his years in the Dizzy Gillespie band. The pieces presented the quintet with technical challenges, which they handled with energy, humour and flair.

And so from the sun-soaked streets of South America to late 19th/early 20th-century France, with Albert Roussel and better-known compatriots Debussy and Poulenc. Joined by guest artist Ian Brown on the piano, the Quintet gave a glowing account of Roussel’s Divertissement, the vigorous outer sections finely contrasting the dreamy central section. Brown then treated the audience to a dazzling display of technical artistry in two Debussy preludes, the ethereal La terrasse des audiences au clair de lune, and Feux d’artifice, notable for its atonality and fragmented structure. The finale, Poulenc’s Sextuor for piano and wind quintet, with its vigour, warmth and general sense of fun, brought the evening to a suitably celebratory close.