A trio of trios were next. The first comprised Adam Durcacz (piano), Simon Cooper (cello) and Mr Bird (violin) who played *Beethoven's Trio in C minor (1st movement),* a beautiful piece, performed incredibly well. The second trio (Chung-Sui Kwok and Phil Gale, violins; Chris Lewis, piano) played *Corelli's Trio in D minor.* The third, a wind trio, performed another Beethoven piece - *Wind Trio in C (1st movement);* Nick Myers' frivolous bassoon (which I confused with an oboe - oh! the shame) perfectly accompanied Joanna Thompson's and Danny Ryan's buoyant clarinet and flute respectively. All three trios played to an astonishing level of skill that amazed not only me but many other members of the audience as well.

The Madrigal Ensemble was also highly impressive, especially as one of their number (Rachael Thorp) was too ill to make the concert and they had to endeavour to continue with depleted ranks. Their two pieces (a John Farmer song that had had "at least two rehearsals" and *The Long Day Closes,* written by Arthur Sullivan) were a welcome break from the previous instrumental works, all singers performing extremely well and with an obvious love of the pieces they sang.

The preposterously named Three Muffins and Man with a Bagel were the first jazz group of the evening, playing *Sweet Home Chicago.* The standard of playing and particularly improvisation from the group (all blue blazers) amazed many, and any timing issues that appeared in the Jazz Concert had all but cleared up by tonight. Eddie Bolger, in particular, stood out amongst a group of talented musicians, with his fluid, mellow tone. The only complaint seemed to be that the one song was nowhere near enough.

A very impressive string quartet and fourth trio ended the classical element of the concert. The quartet - Mr Bird (violin), Phil Gale (violin), Alistair Mills (viola) and Rob Borthwick (cello) - played another Beethoven piece, and, indeed, another first movement, this time *Quartet Op. 18, Number 1, in F.* Yet again all the performers were exceptional, each note not only played correctly but with passion. The fourth trio played Mozart's *Piano Trio in Bb Major,* once again the first movement. Indeed, it was quite satisfying to hear a string trio play in a major key; once more all players performed impeccably.

The final group of the night were The Old School Syncopators, who abbreviate rather unfortunately to TOSS, but this was their only real fault. The highlight of this 'set', for me, was *You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans,* and although I had heard it before at the jazz concert, it was still highly enjoyable, though one suspects that New Orleans isn't quite as nice as the song. The more up-tempo *Jazz-me Blues* rounded off an incredible evening, and I pity the fool who decided not to go.

James Dixon (L6DMW)



N.J. Hipkiss (Art Department)

The Winter's Tale is a dark, unsettling play, and one of Shakespeare's last. Its complexity and ambiguous nature, and the fact that it is a tragi-comedy, make it an extremely hard play to do. With this in mind, I awaited its start with apprehension. My fears were proved to be unfounded, as it soon became clear to me that it was going to be excellent. It was a play of astonishing talent, extremely well directed and acted, with great music and ingenious use of the stage. I knew I was in for a good night.

Act I opened with haunting madrigals, setting the scene for the cold palatial lands of Sicilia. Charlie Carrick played Polixenes, the King of Bohemia. Luke Roberts produced a seemingly playful, jovial Leontes, entreating his good friend to stay on for longer.

Hermoine was from the start an all smiling and elegant woman, played excellently by Faye Castelow. Her warm-hearted jokes and easygoing nature made her easily likeable as she convinced Polixenes to stay as her guest. Luke's performance went on to show us a man building himself up into fits of anger, his face contorting into a fiery rage that startled me! Meanwhile the casual Polixenes (Charlie Carrick) seemed thoroughly likeable, and certainly not deserving of this intense anger that Leontes thrust upon him.

Will Featherstone gave a heartfelt performance as Leontes' counsellor Camillo. His sadness at Leontes' accusation of Hermoine was obvious; here was a noble and loyal man, intensely upset and mournful. It took further passion from Luke Roberts to convince

him of the guilt of his Queen, and we were treated again to the sight of Leontes working himself into a frenzied tirade. Charlie, with a clever smile and a cool charm, played Polixenes as a likeable and intelligent man. Helen Apsey and Harriet Pearson were Faye's ladies-in-waiting, and they began Act II by playing with and gently teasing the innocent and mischievous Mamillius, played by Tom Machell. Faye has great talent, and played a strong, convincing and powerful woman. The contrast between Hermoine and the King was made ever more apparent. She stood her ground, and our sympathies had to lie with her. As Leontes was adamant about her guilt, Faye, although intensely distraught, remained pragmatic, and we felt for her as she was led away, at Leontes' request, by guards. At the performance I attended it was Matthew Smith who played the loyal Antigonus, and his calm voice and gentle tone perfectly offset our dislike of Leontes.

Meanwhile, Antigonus' wife Paulina is attempting to visit her Queen, Hermoine, who is in jail. Shakespeare rarely portrayed women favourably in his plays, but *The Winter's Tale* is an exception. Paulina is a powerful and commanding woman, pragmatic and brave. Marie Hagen performed this challenging role to a high standard. She forced the tremulous governor of the goal (George Scratcherd) to allow her a meeting with Emilia, the lady-in-waiting, played by Helen Apsey. Marie, with a powerful and piercing anger, showed us that she would take on Leontes, and could not be stopped.

I was greatly impressed at the passion that both Luke and Marie portrayed as they argued, and I admired Paulina for taking him on. It is the gentle and peaceful Antigonus (Matthew Smith), however, who saves the baby's life, offering to take it away to some far off land rather than it be killed. As he bowed on one knee in front of the King I was full of admiration.

Mr Armstrong had the entire audience move out of the theatre and onto the balconies of the hall for the third act, where we watched the chilling court scene from above, like ghastly spectators at a hanging. A quick glance around showed me that nobody was smiling; the sense of grief the play had already instilled was somehow too real.

Hugely dramatic, Leontes read out the accusations not only to the characters present, but also to us the audience; we were fully involved. As I watched the slow and painful walk of Hermoine, weak from childbirth and wearing a simple white garment, I recognized the fragility, especially as she struggled to climb the stairs to mount the stage. Her speech was heartfelt; she was innocent; I felt great sympathy. It was a tragic and horrifying spectacle, especially when viewed from above, and in the setting of the vast hall.

To the booming sounds of a storm we were transported to wild Bohemia, where Matthew Smith as Antigonus was leaving the baby. His grief was extremely apparent and heartfelt: an excellent performance.

The Winter's Tale contains the famous stage direction *Exit, pursued by a bear.* It is a hard thing to do, and directors tackle it many ways. Robin Whaley was the bear in this production, sporting a horrifying head with red glowing eyes: and as he lurched closer and closer to Antigonus I was reminded of a plague doctor: the head had the same chilling stare. Robin was a good bear. Miss Hipkiss was the creator of this bear, and of the fine poster.

Comedy comes as a huge relief to the audience, as the scene progresses. Mr Squires played an excellent Shepherd, suitably befuddled upon the finding of the baby. His calm tones and gestures were an excellent contrast to his son, the clown. As Tom Furness came screaming and whooping up the hall, full of wild news, the change in tone was obvious.

As we moved back into the theatre it was to find it transformed into the round. The happy sheep-shearing festival was full of music and haystacks, dancing and laughter. The music here was played by various members of the school, and was snazzy! The scene was great fun, with details such as friction between Roisin Kelliher and Hannah Europe-Finner, two shepherdesses fighting over Tom Furness, and the entertaining dance, making a sound and resolved scene.

Perdita and Florizel are tricky parts to play in *The Winter's Tale*: they are the star-crossed illicit lovers. Hannah Smith and Sam Chapman as such were admirable, and convincing. Leon Scott played Autolycus, a wily yet lovable rogue, and proved to be extremely talented. His animated antics brought more laughter from the audience as he danced, sang, played his saxophone and flirted with the ladies, and gents, of the audience. When he and Tom were on stage together there was much hilarity.

It was with a shock that the laughter stopped, as the disguised Polixenes revealed himself and his anger. As doom set in once more, we returned to Sicilia, where Florizel and Perdita had fled, pursued by Camillo and Polixenes.

We were moved back to the main hall, this time mingling with the cast. The act began with some beautiful singing from Matt Lloyd, and it was a quiet, eerie experience. Marie Hagen pulled back the curtain to reveal the splendid statue of Hermione. We were all rapt withal as the magic unfolded, and Hermione was brought back to life. Although deep down we knew the statue to be Faye, her first few breaths of life were wondrous, as she slowly cast her eyes about.

Finally everything was going right, Will Featherstone (Camillo) was ecstatically happy to be offered Paulina as a wife, Leontes was finally forgiven and reunited with Hermione and Perdita, and all was smiles and joy.

Congratulations are due to Mr Armstrong on the success of his final play for the RGS, the assistant director Mrs Ross, the stage crew, the entire cast, and to anybody else who helped to bring about this excellent production.

Patrick Otley (L6DAW)

Photographs: Tom Rowley (9H)







