

A Feast of Carols

Sheldon Singers gave their audience at St Paul's Church Honiton a real carolling feast on 22nd December. The concert showed off the versatility of the choir and also gave a rare opportunity to hear the harp played as a solo instrument.

The concert opened with the ladies group Viva singing the gentle "Lute Book Lullaby" before they joined the rest of the singers for the main work of the evening, Benjamin Britten's Ceremony of Carols – a remarkable piece of modern music set to words from medieval to Elizabethan which draw on the old carol traditions. The choruses are interspersed with solo sections which were beautifully sung by Emma Green, Alison Newell, Catherine Early and Nikki Moore. Sheldon Singers are so fortunate to be able to draw upon choir members for such individual contributions. The Ceremony of Carols is also remarkable for being accompanied throughout by only a Harp, played this evening by Katie McClaughry with great delicacy and richness. The instrumental interlude had members of the audience enraptured.

Singing such an eclectic work required real discipline from the singers, and their Director, Julie De'Ath Lancaster, guided them with a masterly hand to give of their best.

Alongside this, the choir sang John Edwards' Wassail – written as a companion-piece to Britten's work and also accompanied on the harp.

After the interval, when everyone enjoyed wine and mince pies, the performers launched into a real festival of traditional carols, with which the audience joined heartily, alternating with choral compositions from the Sheldon Singers. Throughout they were accompanied by Sean Tucker on the organ, and the varied menu of music gave him every opportunity to show off his skills as one of the South West's best-know organists.

After a beautiful rendering of "O Holy Night" by Catherine Early, who has made this carol one of her own, the whole church rang out to "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" before dispersing into the murky night, much uplifted by an evening of splendid music that really set the Christmas spirit.

The Sheldon Singers' next performance is at Sidholme, Sidmouth on 2 June.

Mike King