

American Connections Concert

The antique shops of Honiton are packed with treasures: the familiar, the unfamiliar, some curiosities, and some new-found treasures. Anyone who ventured beyond those shops and into St Paul's Church on Saturday 24 April would have experienced a musical equivalent presented by the far-from-antique and highly regarded Sheldon Singers in their Spring Concert, "AMERICAN CONNECTIONS". Julie De'Ath-Lancaster, sparkling in both dress and personality, guided her able singers and the audience through a wonderfully varied programme of music from across 'the pond'. There were works familiar and unfamiliar by Copland, Ives, Barber and Bernstein, and there were also some curiosities and new-found delights. Probably most notable amongst these was the "Missa Kenya" by Paul Basler. The "Gloria" from the mass, with its rhythmic energy, engaging melodies and the dynamic solo singing of Glyn Jones, proved to be a real show-stopper! A delighted audience was invited to become the rhythm section in a reprise of the "Gloria" and relished the experience.

Some of the music challenged both choir and audience and, despite occasional lapses of pitch in the early part of the programme, the choir always sang with conviction, confidence and self-assurance, clearly inspired and energised by their conductor. Attention to dynamic detail and diction was most impressive and the cleverly chosen programme allowed the choir to show its stylistic versatility and to highlight the strength of both the ladies' and gentlemen's choral singing along with some fine solo work from within the ranks (Peter Smith and Mike Gent). Most importantly, it clearly demonstrated the choir's exuberant enjoyment of singing.

Additional treats during the evening were instrumental, vocal and organ solos. Alison Young (soprano and alto saxophone) enchanted her audience with some intelligently musical playing and the deliciously creamy sound she drew from her saxophones. Soprano soloist Moira Mackay sang four very contrasting American songs which benefitted from the crystal clarity of her diction and the warm tone colours of her voice, giving individual character to the mood of each song. Alex Davies proved a sensitive yet supportive accompanist to both soloists and choir and was given free rein to blow everyone's socks off with his dynamic performance of Charles Ives' "Variations on America" (the tune more familiar to us as "God save the Queen") in which he demonstrated the many colours and sheer power of the superb organ in St Paul's.

Congratulations to Julie De'Ath-Lancaster, The Sheldon Singers and soloists for providing a musically enriching and satisfying evening. Don't miss the next one!