

## 'This Sceptred Isle' - Spring Concert

The Sheldon Singers' gave the appreciative audience at St Paul's Church on Saturday, 27 April an eclectic mix of pieces from composers both traditional and contemporary. Huge choral anthems, such as 'Zadok the Priest' and gentler items, including Purcell's 'Bid the Virtues' for soprano solo and oboe, sat alongside each other in the first half of the programme. As Director of Music Julie De'Ath Lancaster pointed out in her introduction, "it's not often that you hear Mahler and Strauss in the same programme, followed after the interval by a relatively new work by the composer Bob Chilcott, a former member of the King's Singers". But what a musical feast we had!

The first half began with the magnificent anthem 'O thou the Central Orb' by Charles Wood and the choir were immediately up and running, showing a great cohesion of sound in the dramatic first bars which contrasted wonderfully with the sensitive singing in the quieter passages, all accompanied on the organ by the talented Andrew Carter. The audience was then introduced to the delightful soprano soloist, Katie Bond, a Honiton born girl who has now crossed the border to live in darkest Somerset. As soon as she started singing we knew we were in for a treat – beautiful diction and a pure, clear tone which had the ability to be both uplifting and haunting at the same time. Mahler's rather melancholic 'Liebst Du um Schönheit' particularly suited her voice and was one of the highlights of the concert. Katie surely has a great singing future ahead of her.

Mention must be made of the superb instrumentalists that Julie had gathered together for the evening. In particular, Lynn Carter's expertise in handling the tricky oboe part that features so prominently in Bach's 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring' and Nicola New's technical ability that was to the fore in the 'Nocturno' for horn and piano by Franz Strauss.

The second half of the programme was taken up by Bob Chilcott's 'Requiem' which was first performed in the UK in 2010 and so was possibly not familiar to most of the audience. However this is an accessible piece of music beginning gently with the Introit and Kyrie which gradually builds through the more dramatic 'Offertorio' to the lively 'Sanctus' chorus. The disciplined singing of the choir built the mood with their great attention to dynamics and the tenor soloist Glyn Jones ably engaged the audience with his contributions, particularly in the 'Agnus Dei'. Katie Bond was supported well by the chorus in her mellifluous rendition of 'Pie Jesu' and perhaps the highlight of the work for me was the movement 'Thou knowest Lord'. The blend of voices was so effective in this moving piece that it stirred the soul. The 'Lux Aeterna' brought the Requiem to an uplifting conclusion and perhaps on this occasion it was only fitting that the soprano soloist had the final notes.

The Sheldon Singers performed with somewhat reduced numbers this evening, but showed that hard work and commitment always pay off as this was a self-assured and accomplished concert. The dedicated Julie De'Ath Lancaster should be congratulated for her inspired leadership which has nursed this choir from its infancy to the force it is today.

Wendy Randle

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