

CONCERT REVIEW & VIDEO RECORDING - A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

'A great score gets under your skin...' said narrator Philip Taylor in his introduction to Paddock Wood Choral Society's *A Night at the Movies* last night. As this bright, varied and at times ambitious programme unwound, the audience saw how right he was. Putting film music in context with a brief history, the narrator then introduced the first item, and the choir gave us a gentle version of *Blue Skies*, from *The Jazz Singer*, 'where it all began'. Changing the mood, the first extract from Mozart's Requiem followed (accompanied by a poignantly reminiscent still from *Amadeus*, courtesy of the on-screen presentation), with the choir building to a triumphant final Kyrie Eleison and some highly proficient work by accompanist Jon Rawles. Two soloists then stepped up: Ann Tutt sang *Begin the Beguine*, with piano and bongo accompaniment, her lovely voice soaring towards the conclusion (and reminding me that I still have no idea what a beguine is), and Madeleine Bohringer gave us a well-timed, jazzy *Makin' Whoopee*. Another abrupt change of direction and we were in Star Wars territory, *The Battle of the Fates* blasting out with drama and tension as Sith and Jedi fought (to the confounding of quite a few of the older members of the audience who clearly hadn't seen the films).

Next came a guest performance by SMASH, the choir from Paddock Wood Primary School, who gave us a scintillating medley of movie songs, varying in mood from the lively *Stayin' Alive* and the (literally) punchy *Eye of the Tiger* to the beautiful *My Heart will Go On*, with a proficiently-accomplished key change. It was moving to hear a love song sung tenderly by such young voices. Katie Hawkins (director) is clearly a woman who loves her job; when I could take my eyes off the children, it was inspiring to watch her obvious dedication and talent as she encouraged her choir.

Keeping us in the junior school, the choir next performed a selection from *Frozen*, and, hard though it was, the audience managed not to join in with the final, jubilant chorus of *Let it Go*. Completing the first half we had two selections from *Empire of the Sun*: Helen Gotts was the soprano soloist in *Suo Gan*, her clear voice sympathetically supported (no-ticeably by the altos) in the lovely Welsh lullaby, and finally *Exsultate Justi*, a stirring piece that was new to me (and which I went home and instantly downloaded).

A great burst of sound shocked us into the second half as the choir returned to Mozart's Requiem and the *Dies Irae* (another mention for the visuals, which here featured a still of Cate Blanchett as a moody, colourful Elizabeth), and then suddenly we were in the twentieth century, as soloist Dianne Blockley gave us a sensitive, honest *Can't Help Lovin' That Man of Mine*. Staying with the musicals, a quartet from the choir (Jayne Crookshank, Madeleine Bohringer, Tony Twohey and James Corse) performed *Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'*, with a lovely arrangement and a nice 'conversation' between the four soloists. The Best of Bond followed, stirring memories from several decades of various 007s in a medley with plenty of variety and good balance between the raucous and the lyrical. Then soloist Angus Morton sang *Born Free*, in a superb rendition which roused the audience to prolonged and well-deserved applause. But after that high our mood was swiftly darkened: with excellent harmonies and heartfelt poignancy worthy of a Welsh valley, the choir sang *Nearer My God to Thee*, the hymn played by the heroic musicians on the Titanic as she met her doom. *Non Nobis Domine* followed, building up with power and volume as the opening soloist was joined by the rest of the choir, after which soloist Hayley McMechan sang *Think of Me*, from Phantom of the Opera (with Adrian Pitts taking over the accompaniment), a song to whose theatricality her voice was well suited.

Two pieces from *The Mission* followed, with the choir first tackling *On Earth as it is in Heaven*, in which there was quite a lot going on: soloists Ann Tutt and Angela Brown held the melody over on our left, oboist Rachel Balcombe played the Gabriel tune, Steven Pagany played bongos, and the choir tackled the complicated rhythms of the backing themes. Leaving us all slightly breathless, a soloist came next, as Megan Pitts (accompanied by Adrian Pitts) gave us *Nella Fantasia*, sung with pathos, her young, clear voice catching the mood well. The performance ended with *Zadok the Priest*, another blast of sound well-handled by the choir and providing a rousing finale.

I enjoyed the concert very much; it was interesting to see the Paddock Wood Choral Society wearing a rather different hat. The programme was chosen to provide a stimulating range of film music and, although it's not easy to step back from the impact of the individual performances and look at the whole, I think the aim of showing how music serves to add atmosphere, scale and drama to what's happening on screen was achieved. There was a sense of excitement and tension around last night; a little like that moment before the cinema darkens and the curtain goes up. Perhaps this was emanating from a choir tackling something a bit different; perhaps it was the movies, stretching out their magic. Either way, it made for a stimulating evening.

The Paddock Wood Choral Society

Adrian Pitts (director)

Jon Rawles (accompanist)

Philip Taylor (narrator)

With SMASH from Paddock Wood Primary School (director Katie Hawkins)