

Review of Paddock Wood Choral Society Sings Haydn Concert

Saturday March 21 at St. Andrews Church Paddock Wood

Michael Haydn Requiem.

The choir seated on raised staging helped to lift their performance over the orchestra which created a good balance of sound.

The Kyrie begins with a sombre walking bass line that set the mood for the work as a whole. The choir entries were mainly precise and authoritative drawing the listener into the text and the music. The sopranos brought a rich warm tone at their entry and the choir produced good crescendos, beginning with genuine piano sound. There was an underlying challenge in the tuning of the brass throughout the concert.

Dies Irae. I enjoyed the urgency and rhythm of this item. There was a beautiful flowing sound in the arpeggios towards the end that emphasised the rich chords of the final Amens.

Domine Jesu Christe The early entries by the choir seemed uncertain but grew in confidence as it unfolded.

Benedictus This was one of the highlight of the evening. It was beautifully sung and I felt the choir were inspired by the lovely singing of the soloists. In the Benedictus Haydn passes the musical ideas between the chorus and the soloists and the choir produced it rich warm wall of sound that is such a characteristic of their singing under their conductor Adrian Pitts. In the **Agnus Dei** I felt the basses and tenors sound got lost in the volume of the orchestra. It seemed that they were content to sing to themselves and not project out into the church.

Cum Sanctis A great ending to the work. The choir handled the tempo changes well and sang with conviction. I enjoyed the clear shaping of the phrases throughout and the choir chording was strong and positive. The text speaks of certainty after death and the choir and orchestra expressed it musically and brought that assurance to the audience by filling the church with a gorgeous sound.

Joseph Haydn Maria Theresa Mass

Haydn brings energy and the musical skill developed over his lifetime into this Mass. Its simple beauty keeps it popular with choirs and audiences whenever it is performed, and tonight's performance was no exception.

Kyrie Eleison Here the choir delighted the audience with bright joyful singing, managing the arpeggios effortlessly and led seamlessly into the chorus.

Gloria. I felt the dotted notes '*glor - ri - a*' lacked precision and resulted in a loss of vivacity. Overall though, the Gloria rang out full of joy and confidence. Once again I felt the basses lacked conviction with their entries, be proud of being basses and SING! Loved the concluding pages of the Gloria as the vocal parts interacted and wove a memorable tapestry of sound.

Credo Speaking to a choir member during the interval she said this concert was musically the most challenging she had done with the choir. Listening to the choir I was impressed by the standard reached in such a comparatively short rehearsal time with such difficult music. The Credo is a good example. The syncopation passages were managed effortlessly.

Benedictus Haydn mixes the soloists gentle hymn like sections to contrast vividly with the chorus. The choir sang the semitone descending chords accurately, with impressive singing by the altos and sopranos.

Agnus Dei Starts with a sombre unison for the choir creating an awesome sound. The concert ended with a great climax of triumphant sound.

The Soloists Individually they sang their solos with feeling and sincerity, together they blended and listened to each other, not vying for prominence but demonstrating musicianship of high quality. This was a well balanced concert with the Sammartini Recorder Concerto providing a satisfying contemporary contrast of sound between the two Choral works.

Sophie Westbrooke played with engaging musicality and impressive technicality, a young musician with tremendous potential. The acoustics of the church were unfriendly to the quiet low register of the recorder and the cellos were a little heavy for perfect balance, but that said, it did not detract from an engaging concerto.

The PWCS has made steady progress and improvement under the leadership of Adrian Pitts. Non-auditioned amateur choirs of this size often sound fuzzy in their harmony, imprecise in rhythm and strident in the upper register. None of these things apply here as they are a choir who obviously enjoy their singing, present adventurous programmes to a very high standard and interesting variety.

Victor Jordan