

Bedford Choral Society Concert Review – 19th November 2011

Brahms – Song of Destiny
Faure – Cantique de Jean Racine
 Pelleas et Mellisande
 Requiem

This turned out to be a concert mainly of slow tempo music with a faster moving section in the Brahms and in the second movement of Pelleas. Nevertheless, this did not take anything away from the choir's appreciation of the repertoire during rehearsals nor from the audience's enjoyment, some of whom felt this concert was a real highlight for them.

The choir members were positioned randomly and not by section. This was to help members gain more confidence at holding their own part and perhaps to avoid any loss of ensemble between voice parts. Given that the programme was not too demanding, the success of this experiment was evident from the balance of the choir and with the orchestra. The choir's ensemble was always intact internally though not always entirely at ease with the orchestra, mainly in the Brahms. There were some tricky rhythmic moments for the orchestra here though the cross rhythms were effected with particular control.

The Song of Destiny was sung in English, but more work could be done to enunciate the text more clearly. The poem was delivered in colour and expression even if not by the words, though the choir might have been more animated in the middle section for real contrast with the outer sections. Several phrase beginnings and endings were indistinct too where not everyone was as certain of the music. Perhaps this was one drawback of not singing in voice sections. One noticed the well placed timpani triplet ostinato that did not push or drag the slow tempo chosen for the opening section. A pity the D timpani was nearly a tone flat for the last page of the score.

The Cantique was beautifully sung with affection. Praise should be given to the harpist for his careful ensemble and clarity of playing without overcoming the sensitivity of the string orchestra. This was followed by the orchestral suite. Four of the original 5 movements were performed. The penultimate movement, originally Melisande's song 'The king's three blind daughters' which if performed, might have given the soprano soloist something else to sing in addition to the Pie Jesu in the second half of the concert. The movements which stood out were the second movement, Fileuse (the Spinner Girl), with the brilliance of the violins at full speed yet quietly accompanying the main material which wonderfully captured the perpetual motion of the spinning wheel. Then followed the ever-popular third movement, Sicilienne, which is perhaps more well-known in later adaptations for solo instruments, mainly the flute, with piano. The tempo was ideal for that feeling of persistent dance-like progression yet maintaining a sense of reflection and pathos. Here, the flute melody soared with natural colours and blended soloistic tone within the orchestral texture with much sensitivity. In the other movements, praise should be given to the lovely contribution by the 1st horn and 1st oboe whose sounds stood out for its beauty and natural resonance.

The second half of the concert was given over to the 1893 version of the Faure Requiem in which, in the absence of violins, the violas and cellos often carried the important melodic material. The choir knew the work well and sang this with confidence from start to finish. Any blemishes were insignificant compared to the choir and orchestra's overall sense of Faure's musical architecture. The orchestra excelled with well blended colouring and natural nuancing. The baritone soloist, Dawid Kimberg, gave a mature rendering of the two baritone solo sections. The opening of the 'Libera me domine' was passionately sung which inspired the choir as it followed on. There were rather too many extra punctuations and mini breaths in the Pie Jesu, sung by Bethany Seymour, for a real sense of line. Though her top register was adequate, she did not have the tone and colours needed for the lowest pitched part of the aria, the 'sempiternam' at the close of the movement. Her contribution did not match the musicality and involvement of the baritone soloist.