

Concert Review - Bedford Choral Society

December 11th 2010 - Bedford Corn Exchange

- Haydn - 'The Storm'
- Mozart - Clarinet Concerto
- Mozart - 'Requiem'

This was a well-proportioned concert with choral works either side of an orchestral work. The choir were alert and up for a good sing and were always clearly heard over a well rehearsed orchestra who showed how to accompany and compensated well given that they were not playing on period instruments. Michael Rose gave a real sense of determination to ensure everyone performed to their best, under his baton. The performance was given, deservedly, to an almost capacity audience who clearly appreciated all three works.

'Der Sturm' was an ideal opener giving the orchestra a chance to set the stormy scene and the choir to feel the acoustic without apprehension. The slower D major sections were sung with colour and charm.

The clarinet concerto by Mozart was played effortlessly by the young Ben Westlake whose platform style is unique as he addressed the full radius of the hall and played to every person. Having accompanied countless clarinetists in this piece over the decades, one knows where the trouble spots are. It was a joy to hear a performance where the music was unhindered by any hint of undeveloped technique and musicianship. The outer movements tended to lose a little of the tempo by the orchestra but Ben quite surreptitiously managed to pull the tempo back during his solo moments, particularly in the Rondo theme of the last movement. A song-full middle movement gave a beautiful contrast.

The final work, Mozart's Requiem, occupied the entire second half. This was a spirited performance with real contrasts between the movements. All four voice parts showed their ability to shine, especially in the fugues. The orchestra was sensitive and balanced equally well with the choir and the soloists. We must congratulate the trombonist whose duet with the bass was managed with such lovely tone and ensemble, given the sheer distance between them. The Dies Irae began with such force and impact that I felt the moisture on my forehead (well proverbially). The final fugue taken at a much quicker pace than the first time around was a fitting conclusion and the choir managed to keep to the pace admirably. The soloists blended fairly well but with such a good bass, it was a little bottom heavy in the ensembles of which there were several. The tenor's vocal tone took some getting used to and he had a few problematic moments. The mezzo's voice was lovely but under-powered and she struggled to contribute sufficiently in the ensembles in her lower register. The soprano had a pleasant but bland tone and also needed a bigger sound to really shine over the texture.

Tim Grant-Jones

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