

The final concert of Brian Newman's leadership of Heathfield Choral Society included the work that first brought him to the choir's attention 23 years ago. Brahms' *Requiem* remains a very ambitious choice for a choir and now, as then, the performance did not disappoint.

The evening started with Faure's contemplative *Cantique de Jean Racine* given a sublime rendition by the choir to the accompaniment of strings and harp from Camerata of London. This was followed by a spirited performance of Elgar's *Serenade for Strings*.

The choir was then joined by Thomas Niesser who sang the baritone solos in Vaughan William's *Five Mystical Songs*. Thomas brought the words to life with his fine singing and phrasing, whilst the choir sang sometimes as an accompaniment to his solos, and sometimes singing out in joyful acclamation as in: *Let all the world in every corner sing...*

After the break came Brahms's "German Requiem", sung in English. This much-loved work is a big sing for the choir both in the vocal range needed and the complexity of the writing. The mood was set with the opening chorus *Blessed are they that mourn*, with excellent blending, phrasing and diction. The second section was particularly good with a fine orchestral crescendo leading to the choir's unison entry *Behold, all flesh is as the grass*. This was spine tingling stuff from the choir, who demonstrated their full vocal range from the quietest pianissimo to full blown forte!

Thomas joined the choir in the third section *Lord let me know mine end*. He has a strong, clear voice which perfectly matched the music. Once again, the choir showed their power in the extended fugue *But the righteous souls are in the hands of God* never giving an inch to the powerful playing of Camerata in full flight! I have written in my notes: a wall of sound from the choir!

*How lovely are thy dwellings* is the deservedly best-known section of the Requiem and was sung with warmth and subtlety by the choir

Ella de Jongh has sung with the choir before and it is good to see and hear her in Heathfield again. She has only one number to sing in the Requiem and Ella made the most of it. The poignant words *Ye now have sorrow* were beautifully shaped and moulded and the choir provided discreet accompaniment throughout.

The Baritone and chorus came together for the penultimate piece. There was some strong, intense singing in this section building up to a powerful entry on *For behold,*

*the trumpet shall sound* with the altos then leading the way into an excellent fugue *Worthy art thou..*

The final section *Blessed art the dead* is given to the choir and orchestra alone. Not an easy movement to perform (by now the choir has been singing intensively for over an hour) their concentration and commitment did not falter and the work closed with a dramatic climax followed by a sense of calm repose and completion. Their work was done.

This was a very fine performance, beautifully rehearsed and shaped and much appreciated by the audience. A fitting finale to Brian's long association with the Choral Society.

Richard Mason

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