

THURROCK CHORAL SOCIETY REVIEW: AUTUMN CONCERT 13.11.10

CHORAL SOCIETY ON SONG AGAIN!

It was good to find Thurrock Choral Society still keeping 'classic' choral music alive in Thurrock with their latest Autumn Concert at the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Grays on Saturday, before a small but enthusiastic audience.

The chosen works were Hummel's Mass in B flat and Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, with César Franck's Chorale No. 3, a favourite organ piece, as an apt filler.

Like Haydn's late masses and Beethoven's Mass in C (which the Society has also performed in recent years), the Hummel work was written to be performed at the Esterházy court in Hungary on the name-day of a princess, and it was probably premièred there in 1810. However, unlike those earlier settings, Hummel's is exclusively for chorus and orchestra, without solo singers. On Saturday the orchestral accompaniment was expertly played on the church's electronic organ by Raymond Lewis, thus saving the Society the expense of hiring an orchestra merely for the first half of the evening.

Though their numbers were unfortunately reduced by illness, and the demands placed on those present were consequently greater, the chorus succeeded, for the most part, in giving an effective and enjoyable performance of the work. Highlights included the bold opening of the Gloria, the vigorous Quoniam, the nicely sung alto melody of the Benedictus, and the well-conveyed mood of the Agnus Dei.

Raymond Lewis's exciting performance of the organ solo, coming immediately after the interval, made the very most of the available instrument, and the concert ended with the Bernstein work: a setting of three complete Biblical psalms, with excerpts from three others, in the original Hebrew. In its full version this work requires a large orchestra, but the composer also wrote a reduced accompaniment, intriguingly scored for organ, harp and percussion, and it was that version which we heard on Saturday, with the harp part skilfully played on keyboard. This was, to the best of my recollection, at least the Society's fourth performance of the work since it was composed in 1965, and a striking performance it was.

A few minor deficiencies in the chorus parts could be readily forgiven amid so much bracingly energetic and well-projected choral singing, whilst Alison Cordingley, substituting at short notice for an indisposed soloist, gave a clear and beautiful account of the lovely solo in the central movement. Musical Director Crispin Lewis conducted throughout the evening with his customary flair and rhythmic instinct.

I say it again: these concerts deserve larger audiences!

Richard Wade