

WINNING CHRISTMAS CONCERT

This year Thurrock Choral Society did not present an Autumn Concert, but delivered an unusual and interesting programme in its Christmas Concert, given at the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Grays on Saturday 14th December.

On this occasion Schubert's (relatively short) Mass in G was followed by two seasonal works: the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* by Vaughan Williams and *Navidad Nuestra (Nativity Story)* by the Argentinean composer Ariel Ramirez, sung in the original South American Spanish.

For the first and last of these the chorus were joined by soprano Jacqueline Dias, whose warm tone and soaring upper register were heard to splendid effect, not least in the Benedictus of the Mass, which gave her a substantial solo opportunity, by Christopher Killerby, whose ringing tenor was a particular asset in the Ramirez (which he clearly enjoyed), and by the Society's regular, and always reliable, baritone soloist Graham Cooper, who also took the solo part in the Vaughan Williams.

The excellent and detailed programme notes included complete texts and (where necessary) translations of the three works, and photographs of the composers, but regrettably did not name the organist, who accompanied the Schubert and Vaughan Williams with formidable mastery of the church's electronic organ, or the superb young percussionist, who contributed so fascinatingly to the Ramirez, playing a box drum with her hands and tambourine with her foot. Elspeth Wilkes, the Society's Rehearsal Accompanist, was the splendid pianist.

Crispin Lewis conducted the programme with his customary expertise.

There was some appreciable choral work in the Schubert and Vaughan Williams, the sopranos gamely tackling some particularly high notes in their parts. I liked the firm entries in, for example, the opening Kyrie, the 'Domine Deus' and 'Et Resurrexit' and the well-blended soft tone at 'Credo...in Spiritum Sanctum' and in the Fantasia. However, the Ramirez was undoubtedly the climax of the evening, its infectious folk rhythms bringing out the very best in the chorus. The warm audience response was fully justified.

Richard Wade