

THURROCK CHORAL SOCIETY REVIEW: SPRING CONCERT 2012

REGAL PERFORMANCE BY ON-SONG SOCIETY!

Like many other choirs and choral societies in this Jubilee Year, Thurrock Choral Society has chosen to include some appropriately royal music in its concert programmes, and there could scarcely be a better choice than the four magnificent anthems which Handel wrote for the Coronation of King George II and Queen Caroline in 1727, one of which, 'Zadok the Priest', has been performed at each subsequent British coronation, including that of our present queen. Thurrock included three of the four in its Spring Concert at the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Grays last Saturday.

Despite a shortage of tenors and basses (particularly tenors), the chorus succeeded well in conveying the splendour of the grander passages, and, perhaps still more memorably, the contrastingly tender and lyrical movements, notably "Let justice and judgement" in 'Let thy hand be strengthened'. There was some excellent singing, the choir blended well, and, if I had some small quibbles about the performances, I nevertheless enjoyed them. My main regret was that the Society had been forced, presumably by financial restraints, to perform the pieces without Handel's orchestral accompaniments. How good it would have been to hear those superb entries for trumpets and drums in 'Zadok' and 'The king shall rejoice'. However, there was compensation in the stylish organ accompaniments of Raymond Lewis and the splendid playing of cellist Jonathan Rees.

In complete contrast, the second half of the programme was devoted to a contemporary work: the Requiem by Bob Chilcott, published only in 2010. A one-time member of the celebrated King's Singers, and a noted conductor and composer, Bob Chilcott (then known as Robert) was the treble soloist on the much-admired 1967 recording of the Fauré Requiem by the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, and influences of that earlier French setting seemed detectable in his own Requiem, for example in the writing for low voices at the opening of the Offertorio, and in the soprano solo of the Pie Jesu. In addition to selected texts from the Catholic Requiem Mass, the Chilcott work also includes a setting of "Thou knowest, Lord" from the Burial Service in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, and requires both soprano and tenor soloists. Unfortunately, on this occasion there was no tenor soloist available, but Madeleine Ladell, a highly effective soprano soloist with a splendid upper register, also successfully took over one of the tenor solos, whilst others were played on the cello by Jonathan Rees – a particularly brilliant idea of the Director, Crispin Lewis. The mild (and occasionally not so mild) dissonances included in the choral parts of this rather lovely work present a challenge to an amateur chorus not especially experienced in modern music, but Thurrock's chorus coped generally very well, and some sections, particularly the Pie Jesu, "Thou knowest, Lord" and the Lux Aeterna were quite beautifully sung. Raymond Lewis found some apt sounds for his organ accompaniments, whilst Crispin Lewis conducted with his customary authority.

Richard Wade