

CHORAL SOCIETY SCORES AGAIN!

Is a semi-opera half an opera? No, it was a popular form of entertainment in C17th England, combining music, dance, spoken dialogue and spectacular stage effects, rather in the manner of our modern musicals. The famous (and tragically short-lived) composer Henry Purcell wrote the music for four such entertainments, and part of a fifth, the second of which, *King Arthur*, was first staged in London in 1691. The words were provided by the celebrated poet John Dryden.

Today *King Arthur* is known chiefly as a concert work, and Thurrock Choral Society chose it for their Spring Concert, at the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Grays on Saturday 18th April.

The plot of *King Arthur* is complicated, but the story centres on a legendary conflict between Arthur, King of the Britons, and Oswald, King of the Saxons. The two are also rivals in love for the beautiful Emmeline. The crucial battle is fought on St. George's Day. Arthur defeats Oswald in hand-to-hand combat. He wins the hand of Emmeline, but allows Oswald his freedom, whilst Britons and Saxons will in future unite to form one nation on our "fairest isle".

And the performance?

Madeleine Ladell made a welcome return to the Society as soprano soloist. I was particularly taken by her brilliant account of "Hither this way!" and her duets with Kate Fun were glorious. This was Kate's first appearance in Thurrock, and I for one hope that it will not be the last. Her rich mezzo-soprano and expressive delivery added much to the evening.

Tenor solos were ably taken by Christopher Killerby, whilst the Society's regular baritone soloist, Graham Cooper, made an appreciable contribution. The chorus blended well, despite some disparity in numbers between vocal sections, and delivered some very enjoyable singing, not least in the famous "freezing" scene and the rollicking "Your hay it is mowed".

I have complained in the past of the Society's failure to acknowledge their concert accompanist in the programme, but on this occasion the organist, Raymond Lewis, was named – and what brilliant accompaniments he provided, his well-chosen registrations making the church's electronic instrument sound uncannily like a Baroque pipe organ!

Local student James Green provided excellent percussion. Crispin Lewis conducted with his usual flair. Roger Smith's narrations helped to explain what was happening in the plot and Sue Horncastle's programme note was interesting.

An intriguing evening!

Richard Wade