

SOCIETY IN FINE VOICE

Following their unusual but welcome Christmas programme, Thurrock Choral Society scored perhaps an even greater success with their performance of Haydn's *The Seasons* at the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Grays, on 26th April 2014.

To the best of my knowledge this was the first performance in Thurrock of Haydn's late masterpiece, certainly the first in recent decades – and what a refreshing work it is to hear!

Haydn set a German version of the English poem of the same name by James Thomson: the Thurrock performance used a new and excellent translation of the German by Michael Pilkington.

The work is scored for three soloists, chorus and, for its period, an unexpectedly large orchestra, which would have overstretched the Society's resources – hence the sensible solution of having the accompaniments played on the church organ – and very well played they were, by organist Raymond Lewis.

The Seasons is a long work, and, partly, no doubt, to bring it into reasonable proportion, the Society had hit upon the happy idea of engaging a narrator to read the words of the self-contained recitatives and arias, rather than having them sung, and omitting the orchestral preludes, rather than having them played on the organ. However, all of the choral numbers were included, apart from a brief passage for "youth choir" during 'Spring', and there was still plenty of opportunity for solo singing around the choruses.

Christopher Field proved a compelling narrator, constantly keeping our interest. Naomi Kilby was throughout a delightful soprano soloist, led the 'spinning' chorus to fine effect, and made the most of the cheeky song about the country girl who outwits an aristocratic philanderer. Making a welcome return after his memorable contribution to the Christmas concert, tenor Christopher Killerby gave another vocally assured and involved performance, whilst Graham Cooper, the Society's regular baritone soloist was, I thought, on particularly fine form. When singing as a trio the three blended superbly.

The chorus were in consistently good - indeed very good - voice, and attentive to Crispin Lewis's predictably accomplished conducting. Having the soloists "sing along" undoubtedly helped – though the altos managed well without professional aid! Choral phrasing and dynamic shading were effectively delivered, and the more chromatic fugal passages were dispatched with confidence.

A truly enjoyable concert.

Richard Wade