

Figlie del coro - 3 December 2000, Mansfield College Chapel

Oxford Girls' Choir and Oxford Baroque Players

directed by Richard Vendome and Penelope Martin-Smith
with Jenny Broome (harp)



Concerto di dame nella Sala di Filarmonici, Venice, 1782,
and play from the gallery at a reception for the future Tsar

review

There cannot be many choirs that can provide the solo singing for an entire concert from within their own ranks. The fact that the Oxford Girls' Choir did this very successfully, in a typically enterprising programme on 3 December, testifies to the choir's commitment to thorough musical and vocal training.

The concert opened with Haydn's *Missa in Angustiis* (or 'Nelson Mass'), with the Oxford Baroque Players conducted by Richard Vendome, which was both spirited and disciplined, the quality of the choral ensemble being particularly evident in the fugal textures. The solos were shared out amongst seven members of the choir who coped with their demands extremely creditably. The placing of the two trumpets in the pulpit served effectively to emphasise their important contribution to this mass.

This was followed by the first performance of *Three Christmas Carols*, Op. 31, by Richard Pantcheff, conducted by Penelope Martin-Smith. These carols are written in a lyrical idiom spiced with mild dissonance and were given a persuasive performance.

The second half started with a rarity - the *Confitebor tibi* of 1756 by Antonio Pampani. This piece may well not have been heard anywhere since the year of Mozart's birth but, in a new edition by Richard Vendome, proved to be a very lovely example of the extrovert vocal writing so typical of Italian composers of this period. Written for the girls of the *Ospedale dell'Ospedaletto* in Venice, this work is full of sensuous vocal lines including significant solos in every movement. These were shared amongst nine members of the choir whose singing was an impressive feature of this memorable concert.

The programme ended with Benjamin Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*, an excellent vehicle for showing off the choir's virtues, with its highly inventive variations of texture and vocal colour, all of which were drawn vividly. The six soloists were excellent and the virtuosic canon 'This little babe' was performed with the panache of a group that knows this music inside out. A special mention must be made of Jenny Broome's beautiful performance of the harp interlude.

Jonathan Darnborough

programme

Missa in Angustiis (1798) - Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

1. Kyrie (Catherine Young, soprano, Alice Armitage, alto)
2. Gloria (Sophie Kent, soprano, Victoria Couper, alto)
3. Credo (Clare McQuitty, soprano, Victoria Couper, alto)
4. Sanctus
5. Benedictus (Caroline Henshaw, soprano, Louisa Nye, alto)
6. Agnus Dei (Catherine Young, soprano, Alice Armitage, alto)

During his long career Joseph Haydn composed at least fourteen masses, the earliest (*Missa brevis*) dating from c.1749. But when he returned to composing church music in 1796 after a 14 year gap the musical world had changed, and this is apparent in the six great masses written between then and 1802, works still firmly grounded in Haydn's Catholic faith, but at the same time symphonically transcendent in their richness of structure. The title *Missa in angustiis* (known to us as the 'Nelson Mass') is Haydn's own, and reflects the anguished state of Europe during the 1790s; it comes as no surprise that the serenity of the music is occasionally broken by portents of war (such as the trumpet calls near the end of the Benedictus).

Three Christmas Carols (op.31) - Richard Pantcheff

*****first performance*****

1. The Cradle Carol
2. Ding, dong! merrily on high [listen...](#) (2.3MB mp3)
3. The Song of Mary

Richard Pantcheff (b.1959) is rapidly establishing a reputation as a composer of sacred music. A former Head Chorister of Ripon Cathedral, he read music at Christ Church, Oxford, studying composition there with Simon Preston and Francis Grier, and winning several prizes. His works have been premièred by the choirs of Christ Church, Salisbury and Winchester Cathedrals.

Confitebor tibi (1756) - Antonio Pampani (1705-1775)

1. Confitebor tibi (Georgia Black, solo)
Memoria (Hannah Nye, Georgia Black, duet)
2. Ut det illis (Felicity Lingard, solo)
3. Fidelia omnia
4. Redemptione misit (Charlotte Roberts, solo)
5. Sanctum (Leonor Fishman, Jessica Glaisher solos)
6. Intellectus bonus (Miranda Jewess, solo)
7. Gloria Patri (Sasha Brown, Louisa Nye, solos)

Pampani's exuberant setting of Psalm 110 (=AV 111) has been edited by Richard Vendome from a photocopy of the original MS provided by the late Jane Berdes, a research student who first introduced the Oxford Girls' Choir to this fascinating and neglected female musical tradition. In eighteenth century Venice composers such as Vivaldi taught music at the four *ospedali*, charitable institutions which supervised the education of the poor, illegitimate, handicapped and orphans, and which competed with each other for the highest musical reputation. The many girls who performed in their choirs and

orchestras were virtuosi of the highest order, as is recounted by such visitors as Rousseau and Dr Burney.

Pampani composed many oratorios, solo motets and operas. As well as belonging to the *Academico Filarmonico*, he was *maestro di coro* at the *Ospedale dell' Ospedaletto* (succeeding Porpora), and wrote his *Confitebor tibi à 4* to be sung there at Sunday Vespers. It is scored for soloists, SSAA chorus, strings, horns and continuo.

A Ceremony of Carols (op.28) - Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

1. Procession
2. Wolcum Yole
3. There is no rose
4. That yonge childe (Victoria Couper, solo)
5. Balulalow (Katie Birtill, solo)
6. As dew in Aprille
7. This little babe
8. Interlude
9. In freezing winter night (Sasha Brown, Isobel Piper, solos)
10. Spring Carol (Hannah Nye, Louisa Nye, duet)
11. Deo gratias
12. Recession

In 1939 Britten and Peter Pears joined W.H.Auden in the United States, but although he was a conscientious objector Britten decided to forsake exile and return home on a Swedish merchant ship in the Spring of 1942. On the journey he composed two of his best-loved choral works, the *Hymn to Saint Cecilia* (op.27) and *A Ceremony of Carols* (op.28). The latter was conceived for female (not boys') voices. It opens and closes with a processional Antiphon for Christmas Vespers; other movements are based on Middle English lyrics. Simple but refined in melody and structure, dazzling in its colour and poetry, it combines voices and harp with a sureness of touch rarely heard in modern choral music. Joy and sadness, excitement and serenity, spring warmth and winter frost are all distilled herein.

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Oxford Baroque Players

violin 1 Ann Lingas
violin 2 Miranda Walton
viola Virginia Bennet-Clark
cello Judith Dallosso
bass Ruth Davis
trumpet 1 Gavin Wells
trumpet 2 Mike Daniels
timpani Hannah Tucker
organ Sally Prittie, Richard Vendome
(chamber organ by William Drake)