

## Review

# Vaulted roof claimed words from the choir

BEETHOVEN inscribed the *Missa Solemnis* in D "from the heart — may it in turn go to the heart."

Dense, complex and at times outstandingly beautiful, it is very much his personal interpretation of the liturgy, reflecting in music the sensitivity of a naturally religious man.

Mood, key signature, everything mirrors the text, and it was a great shame that almost all the words sung by the chorus were lost to the vaulted roof of Guildford Cathedral on Saturday.

Guildford Philharmonic Choir, joined by the Freiburger Bachchor in celebration of the 10th anniversary

of the twinning of Guildford with Freiburg, was in great voice.

Tone was lovely, and the discipline was obviously there because conductor Sir Charles Groves achieved excellent precise entries and exits — it was just the words that were lost.

As a result, the choir, well coached by Neville Creed, became another section of the orchestra, with the soloists providing the anchor of the text.

Ann Mackay, a last-minute replacement for Jane Eaglen, who was taken ill, brought a warm, rich tone to the soprano solo, well matched by Penelope Walker as mezzo soprano.

Richard Morton's resonant, dark tenor voice also

went well with the full-bodied, mellow, bass of Peter Rose.

The work begins with a wonderful *Kyrie*, the soloist echoing the choir's prayer in an accessible setting before the onset of the complexities of the *Gloria and Credo*.

Beethoven's orchestral brilliance comes to the fore in the *Gloria* and the philharmonic orchestra relished it. The drama of the modulation to the *Gratias agimus* was beautifully done and the end of the movement was very exciting.

His setting of the *Credo* contains an incredibly complex fugue. Soprano top notes were a little unsure and there was a slight feeling of togetherness here, but the central *Et Incarnatus Est* was

expressively reflective and well done.

Orchestra leader Hugh Bean captured the spirituality of Beethoven's setting of the transformation of the *Host* in his soaring violin solo in the *Sanctus*.

The sense of meditation and prayerfulness reached its height however, in the magical *Angus Dei*, where hope and fear are expressed through dark music, military drums rumbling behind the prayer for peace.

Choirs and orchestra communicated the introspective and devotional *missa* very effectively, and the performance was a splendid 76th birthday achievement for Sir Charles Groves.

Jane Garrett.