

Chorus is led with love

**Bach's Mass in B Minor
Vivace Chorus and the
Brandenburg Sinfonia,
conductor Jeremy
Backhouse
Guildford Cathedral
Rating ★★★★★**

BACH'S *Mass in B minor* is a work of immense symmetry, beauty and power and Jeremy Backhouse brought it alive with the Vivace Chorus' performance on Saturday, to a packed Guildford Cathedral.

It can be a difficult acoustic but the chorus, orchestra (Brandenburg Sinfonia) and

soloists were balanced with aplomb. The opening Kyrie was carefully shaped, and the central duet was sung with obvious delight by sopranos, Alice Privett and Alys Roberts. The trumpets cut across the ensemble beautifully in the *Gloria*. What was most noticeable was the clarity of the diction and the carefully graded dynamics. I particularly enjoyed the duet between Alice Privett and tenor, Richard Dowling; their voices blended well in the *Domine Deus*.

The second half started

with a wonderfully firm account of the *Credo*. The opening two choral movements were energetic with rhythmic vitality. The duet was equally rich with clear text, shaped diligently throughout by the soloists and Jeremy Backhouse. *Et incarnatus est* and the powerful *Crucifixus* that followed were controlled and paced with a sense of the tortured harmonies. The chorus excelled here. *Et in Spiritum Sanctum* was sung effortlessly by baritone Samuel Queen with the obligato oboes d'amore parts

adding a fitting plangent colour.

We were treated to such warmth in the *Sanctus* and the *Osanna* was triumphant, showing how well the Vivace Chorus can manage the demands of two-choir singing. The two solos (*Benedictus*, *Agnus Dei*) were two poignant and expressive moments following the intensity Backhouse achieved in the previous choral movements, with an impressive flute solo. The final *Dona nobis pacem* showed all that makes the Vivace Chorus such an

enjoyable choir to hear; there was a sense of enjoyment on everyone's face, committed singing and surprising us all with a strong firm sound until the very last note.

Bravo to the Chorus, soloists, orchestra and particularly to Jeremy Backhouse. It was clearly a labour of love for Bach to compile this complex work and that love was evident in Jeremy's strong leadership to bring together an enjoyable evening of a great work of the choral repertoire.

Dr Steven Berryman