

The Armed Man concert

Vivace Chorus – 16 November 2013

Jeremy Backhouse, conductor of the Guildford-based Vivace Chorus, never ceases to craft interesting programmes and last Saturday we were treated to the pairing of Haydn and Karl Jenkins in a choral concert at Guildford Cathedral. Haydn's 'Mass in Time of War' is a work full of pride and positivity and the Chorus sang with energy and purpose throughout; this was very detailed singing with the 'scrambled' chorus singing with superb diction and a broad dynamic palette. The soloists, a team of aspiring young professionals, complemented the choir well; soprano (Alice Rose Privett) sang the Kyrie with ease, and the rich timbre of alto (Angharad Lyddon) was powerful yet blended well. The cello solo in the Gloria was controlled beautifully, supporting the bass soloist (Bozidar Smiljanic). The chorus gave the Credo vitality with precise entries, and a strong sound, which contrasted well with the well-paced Sanctus that followed. The quartet of soloists excelled in the Benedictus, and the whole work finished with the soloists, chorus and orchestra in the compelling and powerful Agnus Dei and the ensuing celebratory 'Dona nobis pacem'.

Karl Jenkins 'Armed Man: A Mass for Peace' was a superb partner to the Haydn; both works are a response to war and both have an optimistic approach to peace through powerful and direct musical ideas. The choir excelled here at showing real passion for delivering the relentless repetition of Jenkin's music, supported by an orchestra that Backhouse conducted with vigour and precision; the balance and blend of the whole work was always judged with care throughout. This work of nearly an hour in length had a narrative that was understood well by Backhouse, as he shaped the work intelligently and with vivid changes of colour, particular in the 'Hosannas'. The soloists did much to bring the text to life in 'Now the guns have stopped', and the cello again soared about the orchestra with the solo in Benedictus. 'Better is Peace' was vibrant and a real pleasure to hear, as was the beautiful and peaceful close to the whole work.

Bravo to Vivace Chorus, soloists, orchestra and particularly Jeremy Backhouse for an enjoyable evening that was more than a concert but something that clearly touched many of the audience members with powerful music performed by a powerful chorus.

Steven Berryman