

Vivace Chorus – Best of British Concert
with the Farnham Youth Choir and Brandenburg Sinfonia
Guildford Cathedral
25 May 2013

The Guildford based Vivace Chorus were in full voice last weekend at Guildford Cathedral, giving a 'Best of British' concert as part of their Contemporary Choral Classics series. Will Todd's *Angel Song II* opened the concert; a beautiful, ethereal evocation of angels on Christmas night. The committed performance was controlled with immense aplomb by Jeremy Backhouse, conductor, who shaped the music with such skill to produce some very arresting changes in dynamic. This is a choir willing to tackle more adventurous repertoire, and they proved it with this piece. Bob Chilcott's *Requiem* was a good choice to follow Todd, as another composer who has produced a significant body of choral works. Vivace Chorus brought this music to life with energy and evident passion throughout, with precise diction. 'Exaudi orationem meam' was a highlight for me in the 'Introit and Kyrie', with powerful solo singing from the tenor Philip Modinos. The ensemble of wind players and percussion were balanced well in the cathedral acoustic, and Backhouse shaped the music throughout with detail and finesse. Emily Garland, soprano, sang the 'Pie Jesu' effortlessly, followed by the energetic and toe-tapping 'Sanctus' from the chorus.

Paul Mealor's *Ubi caritas et amor*, chosen for the Royal Wedding in 2011, was sung with a rich, warm choral sound. The choir blended well, with precise diction and carefully graded shaping gave the piece direction. It was the performance of John Rutter's *Mass of the Children*, featuring the stunning Farnham Youth Choir that gave the audience a work full of captivating melodies, rich harmonies and sensitive accompaniments. The baritone Richard Walshe gave a sensitive and thoughtful account of 'Lord, open thou mine eyes', which followed the beautiful 'Agnus Dei' which was a wonderful dialogue between the Vivace Chorus and the children. The larger ensemble accompanying the Rutter brought the colourful orchestration to life and was balanced against the mass choral forces with immense skill. We all left reminded of how rich, varied and exciting British choral music is today, thanks to Jeremy Backhouse and his inventive programming, with the committed Vivace Chorus, Farnham Youth Choir and promising soloists.

Steven Berryman