

Lancaster and District Choral Society: Spring Concert

It was with some pleasure that I accepted an invitation to write a review of this concert by the Lancaster and District Choral Society, having last done so in the 1970s, when performances of Messiah and Elijah under Betty Morrow in the Ashton Hall stand out in my memory. The concert took place in the Grand Theatre which lives up to its name, dating from 1782 and restored in 1978, shortly after which it was re-opened by Princess Alexandra, then the chancellor of Lancaster University, where I was a music lecturer and organist.

The programme had a contemporary flavour, beginning with Bob Chilcott's A Little Jazz Mass which dates from 2004. In it Bob Chilcott, who is one of the leading choral composers of our time, combines the rhythmic and harmonic idiom of jazz with the traditional Catholic liturgy, to which the choir responded well. They were accompanied by piano and a drum kit, which provided an idiomatic backing. Tenor soloist Matthew Minter then performed with alacrity two popular items: 'La donna e mobile' from Verdi's Rigoletto, and 'Be my love' by the great tenor Mario Lanza. The first half of the programme concluded with a performance of Scaramouche by the French composer Darius Milhaud, which dates from 1937. This three-movement suite was played skilfully by pianists Richard McGregor and Peter Noke, particularly the final Brasileira, with its South American rhythms.

Having moved upstairs to the Circle for the second half, the choral sound was much clearer for the main work in the programme, Carmina Burana by Carl Orff. Always a popular choice, this was directed with confidence by musical director John Perrin, and the choral society was joined by the Ripley St Thomas CE Academy Chapel Choir and by an enhanced percussion ensemble. The bass soloist Andrew Mayor injected some humour into his performance, and the entry of the swan had a touch of drama. Soprano soloist Charlotte Kempster made her presence felt both vocally and visually, and overall this was a performance full of life, albeit destined to end by the wheel of fortune. This was an enterprising production, which was well supported by an enthusiastic audience.

Ian Hare