

60th Anniversary Concert

Simply Bach

The title of this concert was something of an oxymoron. Bach's music is simple in its appeal and beauty, but his composition technique is gigantic and very complicated. Singing and playing Bach is not a 'simple' matter! Huge congratulations to all the musicians who took part in this very special concert. They didn't make the music sound easy, but they sold the beauty and complexity to the capacity audience.

Cornwall's music advisor, James Sargent founded the East Cornwall Bach Choir in 1966 and would have been thrilled to know that 60 years later his legacy is flourishing under the skilled and enthusiastic conducting of Simon Dunbavand. To celebrate the anniversary the latter devised a sparkling programme of works by Bach and even played the Prelude BWV 1047 on the organ to start the second half.

The main works in the concert were Cantatas 20, 4 and 37: they showed Bach at his most creative and inventive. The four soloists were on fine form and gave considered and persuasive renditions of their arias. It was great that they all have links with the South West. Samantha Rowe began her singing career with financial help from East Cornwall Bach Choir. She sang all her arias with radiance and an infectious smile. She also sang an aria from the St John Passion with a flute obbligato played beautifully by Robert Manasse. Celia Stoddart Hunkin, the alto soloist, sang with power and confidence and I particularly enjoyed the two duets with Samantha. Tenor, Michael Graham has a commanding presence and obviously enjoyed the virtuosity in his arias. Matt Secombe grew up in Cornwall and has performed in previous Bach Choir concerts. He sang with great authority when accompanied by David Sheard's trumpet obbligato, but also expressed a joyous spirit of dance in his final aria.

The instrumentalists were excellent throughout, and their performance of Brandenburg Concerto 2, ably led by Mary Eade, was a joy.

However, the choir were the main event of the concert and it was a lovely touch to begin each cantata with a rendition of the chorale on which it was based.

BBC Radio's Matthew Bannister presented the evening with informed and helpful introductions.

It was cold in St German's Priory Church, but I believe all were warmed by the beautiful music and the high standard of the performances.