

It was a very considerable challenge for the smallish ECBC choir to tackle as big a piece as Brahms' German Requiem. But there were some really beautiful moments from the choir under Simon Dumbavand's direction, not least in the 'piano' passages, where the most tender ensemble singing was achieved. The unison sound produced by the tenors and altos in 'Behold All Flesh is as Grass' (Denn alles Fleisch Es Ist Wie Gras) accompanied with great sensitivity and lightness of touch from the double hands of Jonathan Delbridge and Ian Curror, was a particular delight. The juxtaposition of the effortless legato from the choir underpinned by the agitation required of the pianists was superbly explored. By contrast, a full 'forte' needed forces not currently at the disposal of this fine choir. The detail in the more exacting fugal exchanges was lost, for example in the finale to the otherwise exquisite 'How Lovely Are The Dwellings' (Wie Lieblich Sind Deine Wohnungen).

However, with only four basses, the final bottom E flat in Selig Sind Die Toten (Blessed Are The Dead) carried the key change handsomely and created a fitting atmosphere for the finale.

A fifth bass in this concert was the magnificent young bass baritone soloist Matthew Secombe. As well as the Requiem, he chose two further pieces to complement the programme. The astonishing *bel canto* aria by Loewe sat so easily in his range and revealed his previous distinction as a tenor. And with his current predilection for operatic roles, he engaged the delighted audience with his memorised performance.

East Cornwall Bach Choir is busily recruiting top sopranos and the Requiem required them in strength to manage the frequency and duration of many a top A flat. As the choir tired so did the tone and intonation, which was a shame as the gentle passages revealed a choir with a genuine understanding of this dramatic work. Their singing was particularly poignant in their accompaniment to solo soprano Harriet Oakley in 'Ihr Habt Nun Traurigkeit' (Ye Now Have Sorrow).

It is our fortune that Harriet has settled in the West Country where we can enjoy the richness of her distinctive voice. Lucky are the pupils of Devon to have her as role model. It is hoped that our own Cornish pupils, who are also recipients of excellent opportunities, will start to populate our senior choirs.

Harriet's plangent Requiem solo interpreted the pathos and anguish suggested by 'Ye Now Have Sorrow' where the choir, particularly the sopranos, supported her with equal tenderness. She further enhanced the overall programme with not just a fine choice in Schubert's 'Gretchen Am Spinnrade', but with the most beautifully legato lines where her breathing supported a sound that literally floated away.

The Requiem is not quite long enough to be a concert on its own, nor short enough to allow a single complementary work to flourish alongside. Simon Dumbavand's decision to include short recitals within the Requiem was very effective, if at first perhaps unsettling to its overall performance. Particular highlights included the elegiac Brahms Intermezzo No 1 by Jonathan Delbridge and the exceptional accompaniment that Simon provided for his soloists. I have envied Simon Dumbavand's conducting style from previous performances, so was surprised by his use of a baton for the small forces employed for the Requiem. I missed watching both his hands at work on this occasion which may have helped get heads out of copies for this mighty German work.

The faithful audience clearly enjoyed the evening in St Petroc's in Bodmin. We greatly look forward to the choir's next performance at St Germans in May.