

Tayside Organists' Society

Concert by The Strathmore Singers

Wednesday 3rd October 2018

Review by Sally Carus

Tayside Organists' Society was invited to include this concert as part of its 2018/19 programme. The Singers were delighted that a good number of our members made the effort to travel out of Dundee to attend. We were rewarded with a varied and interesting range of choral music and organ accompaniment. The group was founded in 2005 by its conductor Roger Clegg, organist of the church for 20 years, and consists of 13 singers including two lady tenors.

The evening started with a group of three unaccompanied pieces from the Renaissance period. Palestrina's 'Tu es Petrus' and Byrd's 'Emendemus in melius' are typical of the style of the time and were followed by 'Factum est silentium' written a little later, probably in 1618 by English composer Richard Dering. He spent most of his life in the Netherlands and his work uses compositional techniques that heralded the Baroque style in England. Under Roger's expert direction the choir tackled the contrapuntal nature of the music in these three works with confidence.

The singers were similarly confident in the other group of unaccompanied pieces, this time three folk song arrangements by Holst, Vine and Vaughan Williams. These are a complete contrast to the Renaissance pieces, sung in English with very clear diction. The different characters of the songs were brought out with the first two, 'I love my love' and 'Love at my heart' being more reflective and the last, 'Just as the tide was flowing' much more lively.

In between these two groups we were treated to the 'Messe Solennelle' by Vierne. This is a fascinating work which is sadly little heard. Roger Clegg took to the organ console for this work, handing over the conducting to the very able direction of Anne Smith. Written for choir and two organs in 1899 it was first performed in the church of St Sulpice in Paris which has a small choir organ and a great organ at the other end of the building, both by Cavallé-Coll. The work is in the standard short mass form of Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei and is very much in Romantic rather than twentieth century style. The Kyrie opens with great solemnity in C sharp minor while the mysterious antiphonal harmonies of the Benedictus were new sounds in French church music, and the Agnus Dei ends, after antiphonal exchange between choir and organ, serenely in C-sharp major. The two organ parts have been arranged for one instrument and throughout the work there are repeated figures in the organ accompaniment, solid chords in the Sanctus and heavenly bell like sounds in the Agnus Dei. Roger did a great job of making the church organ sound French. I thoroughly enjoyed this introduction to a great piece of music and hope the choir enjoyed it just as much.

The concert concluded with the Five Mystical Songs by Vaughan Williams in which Ken Murray was the baritone soloist. Setting poems by George Herbert the songs

were written only a few years after the Vierne mass but sound much more modern. Vaughan Williams wrote a choice of accompaniments but we heard the organ reduction of the orchestral version with Anne Smith taking over the conducting again. The first four songs are meditations which are quite challenging and the fourth is a solo but the last is a hymn of praise, 'Let all the World in every corner sing' written either for solo or chorus. The choir sang it with great joy and enthusiasm to an organ part requiring some virtuosic playing.

This was a fine ending to a superb evening of music making enjoyed by performers and listeners alike. If you missed this and would like to hear them the Strathmore Singers have two Christmas concerts lined up. On Sunday 16th December at 3pm they will be at Rescobie Church and on Friday 21st December at 7.30 they will be back at Kirriemuir Old Church. They will be pleased to see you.