

Shrewsbury School Community Choir - Some Concert Reviews: 2015 - 2009

Shrewsbury School Community Choir with the Shrewsbury Symphony Orchestra at Shrewsbury Abbey- 20 June 2015: Beethoven's Choral Symphony

Bob Wysome writes ... *"Shrewsbury Symphony Orchestra presented its final concert of the current season at Shrewsbury Abbey and enhanced its growing reputation with a bold performance of Beethoven's Choral Symphony, surely one of the most difficult works in the orchestral repertoire. A conductor of this piece has the onerous task not only of controlling a large body of players, but also a large chorus and four solo singers in the final movement. From the start, the orchestra played with great assurance, biting into the dramatic dotted rhythms with real purpose - all sections made telling contributions but special praise must be given to the woodwind (whose articulation and ensemble were good throughout) and the timpanist, whose control of the work's rhythmic diversity was most impressive. The second movement was taken at breakneck speed, just avoiding disaster on several occasions but played with admirable spirit, with any slips covered by the generous Abbey acoustic. The slow movement was played beautifully and with great sensitivity to Beethoven's dynamics instructions.*

..... and then the final movement, the popular 'Ode to Joy'. Baritone soloist Jonathan May provided a splendid opening outburst, to be well supported by soprano Naomi Harvey, contralto Laura Innes and tenor Jamie Macdougall. The members of Shrewsbury School Community Choir played their part in bringing the symphony to its remarkable climax; no doubt some of the sopranos will be nursing sore throats after singing so many sustained top 'A's.

The evening had begun with a confident performance of the Tragic Overture by Brahms, which was played with commendable accuracy and energy by this hard-working orchestra. As the season closes, special praise must be given to leader Paul Bramwell, whose calm authority is always evident, and to conductor, John Moore, for his skilful direction and the self-belief he instils into his players to produce concerts such as this."

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### English Haydn Festival Chorus in St Leonard's Church, Bridgnorth - 6 June 2015: Haydn's *The Seasons*

**Antony Hodgson writes** .... *"This year's festival theme of 'The Natural World' was probably illuminated most fully in the extensive concert featuring Haydn's 'The Seasons' which was sung in English. On this one occasion the conductor was John Moore who over several years, has directed most of the choristers comprising the Haydn Festival Choir many of whose members also sing under him in the Shrewsbury School Community Choir, it was therefore not surprising that they responded with such accuracy and grace. The hall layout required the soloists to be placed to one side in front of second violins and double basses and this made precise linking of phrases against the chorus, set well back, somewhat difficult but Moore's precise conducting technique went a long way towards solving the problem. This was an illuminating reading. Moore's speeds tended towards swiftness and in general I found this convincing. The highlight of the music lies in the colourful and varied sequence depicting Autumn with its hunting, drinking and dancing. There was one interpretative surprise however: I certainly expected the peasant dance in the celebrations to have been far more measured and heavy-footed. This was a whirlwind of a dance - peasants would never have kept up with it and would surely have needed to discard their farming boots when attempting to do so. The vocal star of the evening was bass Andrew Slater whose powerful voice and immaculate diction made a great impact. I was pleased that the chorus did not seem to tire as the work progressed but in the excitingly-sung final chorus I was disappointed not to hear Haydn's famous high horns in C cutting through the textures."*

This is an excerpt taken from a complete review of the 2015 English Haydn Festival which appeared in the 2015 edition of the Journal of the Haydn Society of Great Britain

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English Haydn Chorus in St Leonard's Church, Bridgnorth - 8 June 2014: Haydn's Mass in Time of War

Antony Hodgson writes *"It is a tradition that the final concert of the Festival should include a choral work. This time it was Haydn's 'Mass in Time of War' otherwise known as 'Paukenmesse' because of the complex timpani part towards the end. This is brilliant scoring: war is not heralded by force but by an extensive series of quiet, menacing drum strokes. The excellent principal singers Natalie Clifton-Griffiths (soprano) Daniel Norman (tenor) and Andrew Slater (bass) also sang in last year's performance of 'The Creation' they were joined this year by Miranda Westcott (contralto) Once again the opening passages were greatly enhanced by the immaculate diction of Andrew Slater and the soloists blended subtly in their ensembles. These solo parts are not extensive, however, and the Mass is largely choral. The Haydn Festival Chorus sang with impressively unified tone conducted by John Moore who has directed the majority of these end-of-festival choral concerts over the years and under whose direction most members of the chorus have performed on many occasions. Orchestral detail was clearly defined and the potential problem of ensemble posed by the considerable distance between the front of the orchestra and the chorus was successfully overcome. An interesting example of co-operation between Festival musicians was indicated by its principal conductor Anthony Halstead playing the continuo part on a chamber-organ. The notable drum solo in the Agnus Dei - the very essence of the philosophy of the Mass - was all the more threatening because of the authentically dry nature of the period instruments. Altogether the Mass represented a moving experience."*

This is an excerpt taken from a complete review of the 2014 English Haydn Festival which appeared in the 2014 edition of the Journal of the Haydn Society of Great Britain

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## St Cecilia Concerts in the Alington Hall - 16/17 November 2013: Mozart's Solemn Vespers

**Martin Knox in the Salopian** ..... *"The Community Choir and choristers from the school's Chapel Choir had waited patiently for their turn. When it came, they were straight in with a sharpness of attack which was to be sustained throughout Mozart's Solemn Vespers. Choir and conductor have been together for a long time now and the rapport that has been established is a joy to watch and to hear. Every cue meets with instant response, every gesture is reflected in the desired change of tempo or dynamic. They cannot but enjoy singing as they do and it is uplifting to witness such fervour.*

*It is also good to see the solo vocal parts being taken by members of the School, their contribution being enthusiastically received. Particularly memorable was Henrike Legner's beautiful rendition of the famous solo for soprano, Laudate Dominum, and she was part of a talented quartet featuring Awen Blandford, Laurence Jeffcoate and Henry Craig. As in every item in which they were involved, the orchestra accompanied the choir magnificently. The amount of hard work that must go into a concert of this scale and this quality is enormous. Never has it sounded so worthwhile."*

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St Cecilia Concerts in the Alington Hall - 1/2 December 2012: Haydn's Maria Therese Mass

Martin Knox in the Salopian *"Readers of The Times may remember a recent correspondence about the relevance of the conductor during a concert. They might even have noticed a letter from a member of the Shrewsbury School Community Choir, asserting the indispensability of the role. Without naming him, the writer was of course referring to our own John Moore, who repaid the compliment with a towering performance of Haydn's Theresienmesse. John is at home in so many fields that it is difficult to see him as a specialist in any, but he has a distinguished background in the works of the great Austrian, and singers and players alike responded unerringly to his direction. The orchestra has never sounded better and if the brilliance of the trumpeters and the heroics of the timpanist stood out, that is not to say that there was a weak link anywhere. The choir, too, was in top form, as witness the exemplary blending of voices in an unaccompanied "miserere nobis". They always sing whole-heartedly and with evident joy in music-making, but last weekend I felt they reached new heights of excellence in precision of attack and release. That they were at one with every nuance of the conducting was a tribute to their preparation and their musicianship.*

Until recently, it has been the practice to bring in professional soloists for such concerts, and in days gone by, a fair sprinkling of hired hands could also be seen in the orchestra. Much to the credit of all concerned, the whole cast on this occasion was "in house". Sienna Holmes, Teresa Fawcett Wood, Meredith Lloyd, Laurence

Jeffcoate, and Rob Cross are all singers I have heard and admired before. They proved worthy of their places at the front and how confidently they stood there, how eloquently they delivered the text. Now and then their contribution was almost drowned by the forces around them, but in the lightly accompanied solos, the effect of their youthful voices was moving.

Late in the evening though it was, the ecstatic momentum of the performance was sustained to the end, culminating in an exuberant *rallentando*. "Authentic"? Perhaps not, but the effect of such flawless execution was stunning. The audience rose in salute."

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### **St Cecilia Concerts in the Alington Hall - 12/13 November 2011: Mozart's Coronation Mass**

**Martin Knox in the Salopian** ..... "It was late when we got to Mozart's "Coronation" Mass and I apologised to my neighbour for having earlier underestimated the running time. "I don't mind if it goes on past midnight" was the reply, a handsome compliment indeed. The massed ranks did not let him down. The singing was inspired, the orchestra was inspired, and believers and unbelievers alike must have been uplifted by the devotional urgency of the experience. In a departure from the usual practice of importing professional soloists, the parts were taken by pupils at the school, further evidence of the flourishing state of the department. Notable among them were Robert Cross (bass) and Sienna Holmes (soprano), the latter quite radiant in the *Agnus Dei*. They were rightly applauded, as were the orchestra and the conductor, but what about the choir? They had sung superbly on both evenings and deserved their own ovation. I take this opportunity of saluting them now, and of acknowledging their important role in the musical life of the school. This was a memorable weekend of celebration."

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Community Choir (augmented) in Birmingham Town Hall - 20 March 2011: Faure Requiem

Martin Knox in the Salopian "The main course of the second half came in the form of the Faure Requiem. The first few bars of the Faure Requiem were also a trifle muted, as distinct from reverently hushed, but the large chorus soon warmed up and the Director can be rightly proud of the response he obtained. The orchestral playing was of a high standard throughout and the whole had a spiritual quality in keeping with the solemnity of the work. It was a treat to hear Stephen Garner's rich baritone fill the hall so effortlessly, and Marianne Shawe-Taylor, deputising at short notice for the indisposed Eleanor Hudson, sang the *Pie Jesu* to great effect. As John Moore informed us, this substitution was only one example of the ill luck that had dogged the rehearsals – and the performance day itself. Several, himself included, had been victims of 'flu during the term, and other hazards had cropped up. It just may be that adversity had contributed extra motivation to the event. Certainly what followed (yes, there was more to come!) had a celebratory quality, often sought, seldom found. Chorus and orchestra threw themselves into Parry's Coronation anthem "I was glad" and at its climax, John Moore, elated and sensing that his forces were with him, risked a series of pauses such as a soloist might indulge in – but three hundred? The response was flawless, a glorious, uplifting conclusion to the evening. It must be exhilarating indeed to participate in such a moment. For a grateful bystander it was profoundly moving."

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### **St Cecilia Concerts in the Alington Hall - 28/29 November 2009: Handel's - Dixit Dominus**

**(The late) Gordon Riley in the Shropshire Star** ..... "For several decades the annual St Cecilia weekends at Shrewsbury School have built up a reputation for attention to detail and improvement. And none have been more richly deserved than the latest libation to the patron saint of music in the Alington Hall. The huge Shrewsbury School Community Choir, backed by the youngsters in the School Symphony Orchestra in its varied groupings, safely scaled new soprano heights with smaller numbers of tenors and basses providing the foundations for a superb team under the discerning baton of director of music, John Moore. Eugene To gave a shimmering curtain-raising solo in Mozart's Piano Concerto in A Major, as a preface to the major *Dixit Dominus* (Handel) and on to Vaughan Williams's delectable London Symphony. But for my family and myself there was added poignancy with the evening dedicated to the memory of my recently deceased wife, Freda, who, for over 25 years joined me in a wonderful journey reviewing for the Shropshire Star nearly all the many productions. A special programme paid tribute to that record, as did the maestro verbally. When the choir voluntarily added a Rachmaninov Vesper as a finale there was hardly a dry eye in the audience, including mine, for such a generous celebration of happy life. The deepest thanks flow from my family and me for such support."