

REVIEW OF BROCKENHURST CHOIR CONCERT, SATURDAY 27th APRIL

The Brockenhurst Choir under their conductor Miriam Newton served up a varied menu in their concert in St Saviour's Church – with Vivaldi for a starter, Mendelssohn for the main course, and a substantial dessert of favourite Verdi opera choruses.

Antonio Vivaldi's ever-popular *Gloria* got off to a clean and sprightly start, followed by well-sustained singing in the *Et in terra pax*. The choir sang with confidence and sensitivity throughout - and how good to hear an amateur group that doesn't have a problem with its tenor line! Soprano Anna Gillingham made a real impact in her duet with mezzo-soprano Marta Fontanals-Simmons, and later in a beautifully-poised *Domine Deus* with Andrew Knights' typically fluent oboe obligato. The whole performance was a delight.

Mendelssohn's setting of Psalm 42 was written in 1839, seven years before his best-known choral masterpiece *Elijah*; but it already foreshadowed his immense skill in writing attractive and tuneful music for both solo and choral voices. Accompanied by a small orchestra – backed up by imaginative use of the organ by Hugh Morris of Christchurch Priory - the choir rose well to the challenge of reflecting the diverse moods of the psalm's text ... at times introspective, but with brighter moments of faith and praise. The outburst of confidence and praise with which it ends was really impressive. And they were having to cope with singing it all in German! (It was very helpful that our programmes included an English translation.)

Was the "dessert" of Verdi choruses really going to work after this? The lively contribution of the choir quickly dispelled any doubts. With renowned accompanist Ross Craigmile at the piano they showed just how versatile they are becoming. Even greater versatility was demonstrated by Anna Gillingham, whose dramatic approach to these operatic pieces highlighted just how differently she had chosen to use her voice in the sacred works. For the final "Brindisi" from *La Traviata* she and the choir were joined by young local tenor Sam Smith (standing in for the indisposed David Rendall), and it would be hard to imagine a more brilliant finale. To say it "brought the house down" is no exaggeration! All-in-all, the evening was a magnificent lesson in what can be achieved when amateur and professional musicians come together with mutual enthusiasm and respect.

Derek Baldwin