

## A TELLING PERFORMANCE OF THE BRAHMS REQUIEM

The Brahms Requiem is a significant work for a choral society to perform. It is by turns dramatic, uplifting, sensitive and telling. The piece requires massive concentration from both the choir and the conductor in order to ensure that the audience has the best experience that this wonderful work can provide. John Hancorn, who has been Eastbourne Choral Society's conductor since 2003, certainly drew a sensitive and beautifully crafted performance from his singers. The time that he has been with them has ensured that he is able to ask and is given, the sensitivity which this piece demands. On this occasion the piece was accompanied by Nancy Cooley and Gareth Hancock – four hands on one piano, who perfectly matched the dynamics and tone of the chorus.

The first half of the evening was a performance of contrast with the pianists playing three Hungarian Dances with great expertise and vigour and the two soloists performing songs in German both individually and together. It gave Ed Ballard the baritone in particular, the chance to show the light and shade in his voice and Sofia Larsson, the soprano gave the audience a flavour of what was to come in the Requiem with her soaring notes. I have never heard the piano in All Saints produce such an effective sound and it was interesting that the lack of an orchestra was almost a blessing in ensuring that we heard the best of both pianists and choir. And of course the conductor was nearer to the chorus in order to ensure that the relationship with them served the piece well. This is not an easy sing. The slow and soft opening leads into some huge choruses with an opportunity for the choir to fill the church with sound. This is a large choir of over 90 singers and one of the important aspects of this performance, was their ability to sing softly in the passages requiring this and yet to expand to a huge sound, particularly in the soaring choruses which abound throughout the work.

The choir chose to sing this in English, and whilst the purists would probably have preferred this to be sung in German, in fact it made the piece enormously accessible and there were certainly people in the audience who were moved to tears. The programme helpfully included the English translation of selected verses from the Lutheran bible which Brahms chose to use rather than the customary Latin. This was a very successful performance by a choir and a conductor who are at the peak of their joint endeavours. I was both moved and enormously pleased to be there and look forward to further concerts by this choir.