

EASTBOURNE CHORAL SOCIETY ON BROADWAY

ROBIN GREGORY REVIEWS THEIR TWO-WAY CONCERT

BAROQUE MEETS BROADWAY was the title given to ECS's concert at All Saints Church on June 11th. In the event, the two halves never actually met, except in the voices of the choir. Before the interval, it was all Vivaldi; after, it was mostly American, though dear Sir Andrew got in by virtue of his success across the Atlantic.

All Saints Church, unlike the Meads Chapel of the same dedication, has a clear rather than a resonant acoustic, which enabled the individual soloists to shine. In addition, experienced conductor John Hancorn was able to conjure delicate choral singing when appropriate without losing audibility. Vivaldi's exquisite *Gloria* was therefore very well served. Mark Smith (keyboard) provided perfect support, and the three young soloists could almost have been drawn from the composer's best singers in his Venetian orphanage choir, so appropriate were they to their vocal lines. Sopranos Daisy Brown and Sarah Forbes and mezzo Melanie Sanders will no doubt develop more power with time; but for the venue and the work they could hardly have been bettered. The five string-players and trumpet of the Eastbourne Players (Chris Phipps, Elaine Patience, Russ Robinson, Martin Angell, Colin Moore and Peter Davison) proved that in this particular type of music, quality does not need quantity.

After the main course, the dessert was a delicious five-minute confection described as *First Movement from Nulla in Mundo*. The title escapes all my reference books, but presumably refers to a cantata or motet. Even on first hearing, and persuasively performed by Daisy Brown (no choir), it was entrancing. I long to hear the complete whatever-it-is. One review has come my way, without much explanatory detail. It tells me that *Nulla in Mundo Pax Sincera* "has deceptive beauties artfully conjured by sly portamentos". I hope that helps!

The Broadway second half gave the choir a chance to tackle something different. Their smart matching blue and black outfits were abandoned in favour of individual smart-casual, and a number of soloists emerged from the choral ranks. Harry Warren's *Lullaby of Broadway* got the full treatment. Then the men had a rest while the ladies boarded his *Chattanooga Choo Choo*. John Hancorn abandoned the baton to sing the hit-song of *South Pacific*, *Some Enchanted Evening*. Hammerstein's lumpy libretto defeated him for a second, but in every way his smooth baritone was tailor-made to play the hero of that great show.

Frank Loesser (pronounced Lesser) started life as a lyricist, but in 1950 his was the music of one of Broadway's finest-ever shows, *Guys and Dolls*. The choir were at their best here; and tenor Rod Brown showed just what a great soloist he has been in Eastbourne for over twenty years with his terrific performance of *Sit down, you're rockin' the boat*. Mark Smith, a truly versatile pianist, gave us three Gershwin numbers, including the brilliant *I got rhythm*. Anastasia Witts stepped out of the choir for a smouldering *Can't help lovin' dat man* from Jerome Kern's masterpiece, *Show Boat*. Shirlene Billeness's solo, to Mark's accompaniment, *Wishing you were somehow here again* was so secure that Andrew Lloyd Webber would have booked her instantly for the role. A series of numbers from *Les Mis* (with choir and soloists Hannah Brooks and Rod

Brown) concluded the formal programme, before a stunning performance of Bernstein's *Tonight* shone the spotlight on Mark Smith, who, with Harry Friar, bass, and John Newman, drums, had provided the glue for the whole of part two. Mark's huge contribution to the town's musical life was recognized in a prolonged standing ovation. Don't miss him playing Rachmaninoff at All Souls Church at 1 p.m. on Wednesday June 29th. Thereafter he plans to move to the West Country.
