

FIRST MESSIAH OF 2013 EASTER IS A WINNER

ROBIN GREGORY REVIEWS EASTBOURNE CHORAL SOCIETY

Only once have I found Handel's Messiah (which he cobbled together in a few weeks) something of a bore. That was under the baton of one of Britain's most famous conductors. He, I suspect, had performed it once too often, and his lack of interest was communicated to his distinguished orchestra and soloists. At All Saints Church on March 23rd, John Hancorn made the winning decision to conduct Mozart's orchestration, which sits so well on modern instruments; and his performers responded superbly.

Eastbourne Choral Society was founded by soprano Elizabeth Muir Lewis, who conducted for some ten years. Baritone John Hancorn has now been on the podium for another decade. It is no surprise that their performances are well attended. There have been highspots: one was the Verdi Requiem where they were joined by the Heathfield Choral Society. And this Messiah was another.

The thirty-three musicians of the Eastbourne Players (led by Chris Phipps) made a generous contribution to the evening's success, responding to the conductor's beat with fine precision, and communicating the "Mozart sound" with real understanding. The four soloists (so important in Messiah) sang with discreet ornamentation and accuracy. Nick Pritchard's tenor was the first voice we heard. His "Comfort Ye" and "Every Valley", and his substantial role in Part Two, displayed confidence and musicality. Baritone George Humphreys added power and a concern for meaning to the quartet's list of attributes: I should love to hear him in a solo recital some day. Andrea Tweedale sang "I know that my Redeemer Liveth" (and indeed her entire part) giving no hint that she had accepted the engagement at very short notice. As her voice matures and gains weight she promises to be a soprano of whom we shall hear far more. The Alto part was sung by counter-tenor Tim Clifford Hill. He is only in his 25th year, and has already enjoyed considerable success on radio and film. We could certainly see why that should be so, and as his voice matures and gains projection his will undoubtedly be a name to watch.

The Choir sang supremely well throughout. A number of new younger members no doubt accounted for the apparent ease with which the sopranos climbed ever higher in the Hallelujah Chorus. The tenor section (in many choirs the weak link) was exceptionally fine, and the entire evening was a cause for celebration. If John Hancorn can make them all sing this well, we shall look forward with eager anticipation to their coming concerts.