

EASTBOURNE PREMIERE GIVEN BY CHORAL SOCIETY

Review by ROBIN GREGORY

Howard Goodall is composer, conductor and presenter, well-known to Classic FM listeners among others. His many compositions include the musical "Love Story", which was first presented at the Minerva Theatre in Chichester before transferring to London. Eastbourne Choral Society's Director, John Hancorn, decided to pair Goodall's fascinating choral work "Eternal Light" with the much-loved Requiem by Fauré, and the decision was fully justified on Saturday 29th November at All Saints' Church in Carlisle Road.

Putting on a choral concert is far from simple. "Eternal Light" lasts about forty minutes, and is scored for the accompaniment of a small string orchestra, so that was fine. But would it then be necessary to bring in some wind instruments just for the Fauré? Surprisingly the beautiful French Requiem seemed actually to be enhanced by the superb playing of the cellists in the Devonshire Chamber Orchestra, judiciously aided by the keyboard, so the winds were not missed! Furthermore, the Fauré demands a fine soprano and baritone, whereas the Goodall usually needs in addition a tenor (Alfie Boe on the recording, I believe). The problem was solved, at no extra expense, because baritone Andrew Robinson was able in the main to sing the part with no apparent difficulty or "change of gear", and occasionally the choir itself could cover.

"Eternal Light" is rare in that it is far from an easy sing for the choir, but a very easy listen for the audience. The ECO is now a large choir, with the welcome addition of several more men; but the rehearsals had certainly ensured that they integrated with the long-term singers. The choral balance was excellent throughout, even in "Eternal Light", which sets a variety of literary sources. The words, frankly, are of very variable quality; but they gained stature from the musical performance. The soloists could hardly have been bettered: Andrew Robinson's rounded baritone brought out every word, and the beauty of Shona Hull's soprano was as good in Goodall as in Fauré. I hope to hear far more from her.

Piano and keyboard were in the capable hands of Nancy Cooley and Gareth Hancock. During the interval I spoke to a number of the paying customers, who were universally impressed with what they were hearing. No wonder conductor John Hancorn looked pleased as he took a very well-deserved bow.