

## EASTBOURNE CHORAL SOCIETY'S CHRISTMAS OFFERING

ROBIN GREGORY was at All Saints' Church on Saturday December 1<sup>st</sup>.

When the ECS perform at All Saints under their conductor John Hancorn, one can be sure of two things: the building will be warm and welcoming; and the music will have a few surprises. The first day of December was cold and clear, but heart and body were soon warmed once the audience (including the town's ubiquitous Mayor) was safely seated.

A stirring fanfare began the proceedings, played by Harlequin Brass: eight men and true who would throughout the evening fill the church with their joyous sound. Their Corelli and Palestrina after the interval were undoubtedly highspots, and their contribution to Rutter's Gloria (which closed the evening) truly memorable.

Along the way we enjoyed an eclectic mix of Christmassy items. Four times we rose from the pews to sing along: to the originally-Latin carol 'O Come, Emmanuel', to the originally-German "Unto us is Born a Son", to the words of an American pastor in "It Came upon the Midnight Clear", and (of course) to "While Shepherds Watched". But there was far more to the evening than community singing! Baritone Tristan Hambleton, with his clear and accurate intonation, joined the Choir for Rutter's arrangement of the Wexford Carol, and was the soloist in Vaughan Williams's Fantasia on Christmas Carols. In a song new to most of us ("Still, Still, Still" by Gotsch) the sparkling piano accompaniment to Tristan's performance was in the safe hands of David Force, whose organ-playing in items by Dandrieu and Wely (I kid you not) proved that you can really swing at the organ's keyboard: I must hear Wely's Bolero "Vous qui desirez sans fin" (pew!) again.

There were too many more good things to mention them all, except for the main event: Rutter's Gloria, which was first performed in the U.S.A in 1974. Three movements to a Latin text (and lots going on) this is one of my favourite Rutter works, free from the pop-song schmalz of some of his later, and shorter, compositions. If the finale puts one in mind of Walton's Belshazzar, then that's a high compliment. It's a big "sing" for the choir, who were joined by the nine young ladies of the Academy Vocal Ensemble, with their exciting top notes. There was rhythmic support by timpanist Richard Horne and percussionist Fabian Edwards. Harlequin Brass was at its best. David Force was superb, especially in the organ decorations of the second movement. Choir and conductor can justifiably feel that this was the right way to close a truly different Christmas concert.