

Eastbourne Choral Society sparkles in Vivaldi and Rossini

REVIEW by Robin Gregory

All Saints Church was well-filled for the E.C.S. concert on July 5th. Conductor John Hancorn had chosen two works which play well without an expensive orchestra, and the result was an evening which gave a special chance for the singers in the choir to show what a high standard they have now achieved.

The short first half presented excerpts from Vivaldi's Gloria. This early 18th century work was sensitively accompanied on the Church's fine Bluthner piano by Duncan Reid; and three members of the choir (Cat Chapman, Zoe Harris and Arabella Waller) seized their opportunities as soloists. It was good to hear a choir so balanced and alert to John's conception of this happy work.

After the interval, we heard Rossini's Petite Messe Solennelle: well-known to be neither little nor solemn. And a rather unusual mass too! In his early seventies the composer offered an operatic, singable confection, full of tunes, and demanding fine singers. It was originally designed to be accompanied by two pianos and a harmonium: on this occasion we had the Bluthner again, and an electronic keyboard. Duncan now changed seats and "became" the harmonium, while Nancy Cooley beguiled us at the piano. Four fine singers (soprano Vanessa Woodfine, mezzo Maria Jones, tenor Paul Austin Kelly, and bass Alex Roose) ensured that the important solo passages were able to shine; and the choir were pin-sharp in their responses to the conductor's (and the composer's) wishes. There were many details to admire: not least the wonderful attack of the chorus in the Amens. By the time Maria brought the work to its final operatic conclusion in the Agnus Dei we had shared the composer's delight in this ecstatic celebration of the joys of music-making.