

venue 24

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Arts

Society keeps its composure

THE concert given by **St Albans Choral Society** with **Orchestra Nova** in **Homewood Road Church** again demonstrated the skill of music director **George Vass** in putting together a programme which played to the choir's strengths.

It provided the perfect setting for two pieces by contemporary composer **Cecilia McDowall** in celebration of her 60th birthday.

A leading British composer, she has, for several years, been composer-in-association with St Albans Choral Society who have performed her works to acclaim. She was present at the concert to acknowledge the enthusiastic applause

The choir gave a confident and moving rendition of her cantata *Ave maris stella*, the sopranos in particular relishing the arching phrases. Soprano **Marianne Cotterill** provided the two short recitatives with a touching simplicity.

McDowall's *Crossing the Bridge* was being given its world premiere in this format by the strings of Orchestra Nova. The opening melancholic mood captures the significance of the destruction of the historic bridge in Mostar, and ends in poignant silence. The same palette of sounds and colours carries over the short middle section with its quirky rhythms reminiscent of Stravinsky.

The other pieces in the programme were all from the classical era. **Mozart's** familiar *Ave verum* was movingly performed, although pitch was sometimes difficult to maintain. Marianne Cotterill provided a strong, authoritative opening to **Haydn's** early *Ave Regina in A* and impressed with unforced high notes in the cadenza. The choral entry could have been a little more confident but the voices blended well together.

Mendelssohn's motet *Verleih uns Frieden* was sung in German with meticulous attention to pronunciation. The choir demonstrated its ability to produce lush tones, matching the warm sounds of the lower strings of the orchestra. The tenor and bass entry was assured and the altos in particular shone.

Mendelssohn also opened the programme with Orchestra Nova performing his *String Sinfonia No 10 in B minor*. The opening section was relaxed and unhurried with warm tones again from the lower strings. The sweeping legato phrases of the Allegro punctuated with strong rhythmic sections and several key changes built to an exciting finish.

The concert ended with **Schubert's** *Mass in G*. Again a strong opening Kyrie from the choir and a dramatic entry by Marianne Cotterill. The Gloria was vigorous, and the Et resurrexit thrilling in its intensity.

The sopranos were bright and energetic in the Sanctus with strong dramatic entries from all voices. The trio of soloists in the Benedictus was a little top-heavy with bass-baritone **Frederick Long** rather overwhelmed by the incisive tenor voice of **Oliver Johnston** and soprano Marianne Cotterill but the emotion was expressed with heartfelt sincerity.

MARY COOK



High School musicians' lunch date

MUSIC scholars and award winners from **St Albans High School** are putting on the free lunchtime concert at a St Albans church next Wednesday, November 2.

Music is an important part of the school's curriculum and the students will be presenting a varied programme of instrumental and vocal items.

The programme at **St Peter's Church**, St Albans, starts at 1pm and there will be a retiring collection in aid of Grove House.

St Cecilia's miracle continues

ONE of the miracles of music in St Albans is the fact that the city's biennial **St Cecilia Festival Society** concert ever works.

For the concert is performed by an amalgam of four separate musical organisations – the **St Albans Symphony Orchestra**, the **St Albans Chamber Choir**, the **Radlett Choral Society** and the **Harpden-based Hardynges Choir**.

But as usual Saturday's concert in **St Albans Abbey**, a performance of **Mendelssohn's** great oratorio, *Elijah*, conducted by the Hardynges Choir's musical director, **Rufus Frowde**, was a huge success.

The massive work, first performed just a

year before the composer's death in 1847, makes huge demands on all those taking part but in Saturday's concert all showed themselves equal to the task.

All three choirs had clearly worked extremely hard in the run up to the event and the result was some extremely pleasing music, although like so many choirs it has a distinct lack of tenors.

Particularly pleasing was the performance of the wonderful unaccompanied trio *Lift thine eyes* in the second part.

For the orchestra the oratorio is something of a tour de force with more than two hours of constant playing but they accomplished the task with great

style and their performance was extremely pleasing.

Once more the St Cecilia Society chose a group of young soloists all at the beginning of their careers. And all four, soprano **Katy Crompton**, mezzo **Angharad Lyddon**, tenor **John Pierce** and bass **Marcus Farnsworth** all gave first class performances.

Marcus Farnsworth, who sang the role of Elijah, proved just why he was this year's song prize winner in the Kathleen Ferrier Competition with his fine performance throughout.

Angharad Lyddon and John Pierce both have very fine voices and gave excellent performances throughout but it was Katy

Crompton who was, for me, the star of the evening.

Not only does she possess an outstanding voice but she added a real touch of drama to her performance which lifted it far above the norm. It would not surprise me to hear a lot more of her in the future.

St Albans Cathedral Choir treble **Alec Newton** gave an excellent performance as the child in the first half of the oratorio.

Rufus Frowde must also be congratulated for his excellent work as conductor of such a huge event. The Hardynges Choir is truly fortunate to have such an outstanding director.

JOHN MANNING



The cast of Wheathampstead Dramatic Society's *Broken Glass*

Audiences raise a glass to Dramatic Society

BROOKLYN in 1938 was the setting for **Wheathampstead Dramatic Society's** production of Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass* earlier this month.

Directed by **Malcolm Hobbs**, the play centred around Sylvia Gellburg, who is struck down by a mysterious paralysis with

no physical cause. Family friend and doctor, Harry Hyman, tries to find what is behind her illness and it soon becomes clear that her marriage to her husband Philip is falling apart.

The play consisted of six characters altogether including Harriet, Sylvia's sister,

Stanton Case, head and boss of Phillip Gellburg, and last but not least Margaret, the happy-go-lucky wife of Doctor Hyman.

It involved 11 scenes and although some were long the cast coped brilliantly, bringing to life the characters and the emotions from such a darkly humorous play.

Feedback from audiences was very positive with comments such as the standard of acting being extremely high and amazement at the amount of lines that were learnt and the actors' abilities to keep their American accents throughout.

RICHARD SUGGITT