

I cannot recall previously leaving a concert wishing that it hadn't ended, but that was the effect on me following Saturday night's Passiontide concert at St Philip's Cathedral given by the Birmingham Bach Choir, during which time seemed to run curiously quickly. Celebrating their centenary, this excellent choir with an amazingly rich sound performed works across 11 centuries, under the direction of Paul Spicer. Opening with a motet by the Flemish composer Orlandus Lassus, his layering of choral texture was gloriously brought out by this superb choir in rich but never saturated sound.

The first half included works by Tallis and Lotti through to Kenneth Leighton's magnificent Crucifix pro nobis. Joined by the tenor Robin Morton, showing little signs of his apparent throat infection, everyone brought a freshness to this work and those who think that mid-twentieth-century choral music is uncommunicative found that that was not the case here.

Excellent organ playing throughout from Martyn Rawles accompanying the choir and in short solo works by Herbert Howells and Brahms in each half displayed his excellent technique on one of Birmingham's finest church organs. Howells was one of the most respected English composers of the 20th century even though his music has made little headway in the concert hall. It was therefore fitting that his Requiem took centre stage in the 2nd half in a dignified performance which was both moving and powerful. It was also good to hear three members of the choir take leads alongside Robin Morton in Soprano Emily Carew-Gibbs Alto Jonathan Spencer and in the bass part Philip Bellshaw whose mother Lettie apparently "loved this work".

It was not only fitting for a Passiontide concert to end with the final choral movement from St John's Passion but also for the audience to refrain until the end of each half before they applauded what was an excellent concert in an acoustically brilliant setting.

Martyn Parfect
