

Keith Horsfall REVIEW: *Bach Mass in B Minor*

5 April. Lichfield Cathedral



Keith Horsfall

Has an Hons degree in Music and a cello performers Diploma. He is a Fellow of the Royals Society of Arts and has been involved in conducting, arts education, and directing major festivals for over 40 years.

Bach's B Minor Mass is a tour de force, arguably the finest choral piece ever created. It is complex, has a dense texture and tests the stamina of the finest of choirs. It can sometimes seem to drag in performance, but conductor Paul Spicer's reading of the work in Lichfield Cathedral brought the work to life with a dancing touch that enabled all that complexity to shine through with the light and precise singing of the choir. Even the most complex of the movements had 'air' in them so that the clarity of line shone through.

Accompanied by the beautifully stylised playing of the Musical and Amicable Society, the choir rose to its task admirably with a well-balanced and clear sound throughout. It brought out the joy of the Sanctus, the smooth overlapping of lines and keys in the heartfelt Crucifixus, a sheer wall of sound in the Credo and the relentless growth of tone in the final Dona Nobis. But perhaps its finest moment of the evening closed the first half of the with the Cum Sancto Spiritu which was quite simply magnificent!

Soprano Sophie Bevan's Laudamus Te, accompanied so sensitively by Catherine Martin's solo violin, was a particular highlight from a superb quartet of soloists. As was the plaintive Agnus Dei from countertenor Simon Ponsford and the sheer enjoyment and lovely balance between Sophie Bevan and the fine voice of tenor Ruari Bowen in the Domine Deus. Baritone Roderick Williams was in fine form too, in particular in the Et in Spiritum.

Special mention must be made of the quite gorgeous playing of the oboe d'amores, bassoons and flutes, and the precise sparkle of the natural trumpets. And quite how Anneke Scott on the natural horn managed to play all those notes without valves was quite astounding!

This was a Birmingham Bach Choir performance at its best and worthy of the finest of settings in Lichfield Cathedral.