

Keith Horshall REVIEW: *The Rainbow Comes & Goes*

23 November, St Paul's Church, Birmingham



Keith Horshall

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.

Conductor Paul Spicer set Birmingham Bach Choir quite a challenge at their November concert! Two pieces by John Ireland – *The Hills* and *Immortality* – opened the evening and were sung with excellent balance and beautifully defined phrasing. The strong surges in sound, particularly in *Immortality*, were really well controlled and not done to excess. This is the choir at its absolute best.

Martin Rawles then interjected on the organ with *The Tree Unfold* by Judith Wier. An unusual piece this, which Martin brought to life with some innovative voicing at the opening and later with intriguing bass sounds towards the end. He was later to perform, with aplomb, *Where the Birds Sing* by Grace Evangeline Mason.

Benjamin Britten's *Five Flower Songs* kept us engaged until the interval. Again, there was some nicely controlled phrasing and the choir jumped well between the spirit of each of the songs, in particular into the *Marsh Flowers* which called for a more dramatic treatment with its well-executed wide dynamic range. After the most approachable of the set, *The Evening Primrose*, which was beautifully sung, it closed with *The Ballad of the Green Broom*. I felt this was a little untidy at times and lost bit of energy, but it was fully regained by the end with the final choral flourish.

The main work after the interval was Richard Rodney Bennett's *The Glory and the Dream*. A strange work this in which the organ part, brilliantly mastered by Martin Rawles, seems completely disconnected from the chorus. It is to the choir's credit therefore, that they gave a fully committed performance of an incredibly difficult piece. However, the music itself seemed somewhat relentless and featureless, although there were some nicely pointed moments of word painting, most notably in the final section with a lovely sense of 'lift' on *Then, sing ye birds...* and again the darker tones in *O ye Fountains...*

Bravo for taking it on, but I'm not sure the music itself was worth all the considerable effort.

Bring on the B Minor!