

REVIEW. **Rachmaninoff: *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom***
1 April St Paul's, Birmingham



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The choice of Rachmaninoff's *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* by Birmingham Bach Choir was a brave one. It is totally unaccompanied and with permanently meandering key changes, reasons perhaps for the rarity of its performances.

As always, the choir's blend of voices under the direction of Paul Spicer was lovely to hear with both the tenors and sopranos in particular excelling in some explosive moments. The work calls for sudden dynamic changes and these were handled convincingly throughout.

Some of the 'word painting' was particularly impressive – the exploding Gloria, the hushed tones of the 'Have Mercy on Me' in the sixth section, the lifting of the sprits in the Cherubic Hymn and the strong declamatory singing in the final two sections spring to mind.

Holding pitch over such long period of unaccompanied singing was always going to test the choir, but the falling soprano thirds at the opening 'Praise the Lord from the heavens' was the only obvious serious moment of danger.

The lovely voice of soprano soloist Corinna Gregory provided a real moment of magic as she soared over the hushed humming of the full choir in 'We laud Thy name'.

Tenor soloist Graham Stroud, who also nobly stood in for Covid-hit William Robinson, was in fine form with chanting introductions for each section.

The prolonged applause at the end indicated that their 'brave choice' had paid off!