

## **Birmingham Bach Choir 6 July 2024**

**– review by Keith Horsfall**

Birmingham Bach Choir's summer concert, which took place in the sumptuous acoustics of St Alban's in Highgate, saw the choir sing at its best. Under the understated direction of Paul Spicer, there was a lovely sound and excellent balance between the parts throughout the concert. An interesting programme which included two works written for the choir – *The Dear Bargain* by David Bednall and *Sound the invisible Trumps* by Paul Spicer himself – lent themselves well to the very nature of the choir. There was much homophonic singing in the programme, thus suiting the building's generous acoustic. Only the rhythmic opening section of Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* didn't quite work in the 'big' acoustic, especially given the rather too prominent (but superbly and energetically played) contributions from harpist Stien de Neef and percussionist Iris van den Boos.

Elgar's meticulous attention to detail was immaculate in his *Give unto the Lord* as was the control of his wonderfully long phrases. Soaring sopranos, dramatic interjections when called for, lovely swells of sound (particularly in the Bednall piece) and the celebratory singing in the final movement of Spicer's piece all contributed to a thoroughly enjoyable overall performance.

During the concert here were lovely solos from soprano Ciara Preston Myakicheff and baritone Isaac Boulter, and from also members of the choir (soprano Corinna Gregory, alto Judith Moreland, tenor Graham Stroud, bass Philip Bellshaw plus the standout solo from countertenor Jonathan Spencer in the second movement of the Bernstein).

Superbly underpinning all was organist Callum Alger, who demonstrated his immense skill in Stanford's *Fantasia and Toccata in D minor*.

A hugely enjoyable concert!