

KEITH HORSFALL REVIEW: A Date with Shakespeare

Bridgnorth, July 2026



Keith Horsfall has a degree in Music and a cello Performers Diploma. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and has been involved in conducting, arts education, and directing major festivals for over 40 years

Birmingham Bach Choir's 'A Date with Shakespeare' promised to be an intriguing afternoon in St Mary Magdalene in Bridgnorth. Ably directed by Paul Spicer and joined by the wonderfully attired Queen Elizabeth I (aka Lesley Smith), the choir cast off any shackles of seriousness and brought a smile to not only their own faces but to that of a sizeable audience too.

'Songs and Sonnets' and 'Music to Hear' by George Shearing bookended the concert and were an utter delight with the choir producing a lovely light touch throughout, especially in the a cappella sections. 'Who is Sylvia' from the first set with its warmth of sound was particularly gorgeous, and indeed provided a fitting encore to close the performance. The accompaniment of piano and jazz double bass, provided by John Turville and Ben Markland respectively, was deliciously colourful.

The stylistic shift from Shearing's music into Vaughan Williams' remarkable a cappella 'Three Shakespeare Songs' was expertly handled, especially in the harmonic complexity of 'The cloud-capp'd towers'.

Ward Swingle's 'It Was a Lover And His Lass', with a nod to his more well-known genre, once again drew smiles from the choir. There was some lovely balanced singing in Wetherall's 'Three Shakespeare Sonnets', and the harsh choral tone elicited in 'Winter' from Johanson's 'Fancies II' was skilfully achieved.

Lesley Smith, as Queen Elizabeth I, wonderfully offered us humour, a patriotic history lesson, social comment, stressed the importance of culture (especially music!) and she even knighted Sir Paul Spicer!

The final line of George Shearing's last song perhaps summed up a perfect way to spend a Sunday afternoon with Birmingham Bach Choir: "This life is most jolly!"