

Wharfedale & Airedale Observer

Yorkshire Voices and the Manchester Camerata in Verdi's 'Requiem' at Leeds Town Hall

There was a buzz of anticipation in the corridors and foyers of Leeds Town Hall last Saturday night as the audience made their way into the auditorium for this performance of Verdi's opera in sacred vestments' - as his Requiem' has sometimes been unkindly dubbed.

The lines of choristers filled the orchestra rises behind the Manchester Camerata - over 300 of them - the combined forces of Harrogate Choral Society, Wakefield-based Yorkshire Philharmonic Choir and the Leeds Met Singers.

All were united for the first time as Yorkshire Voices - brainchild of Andrew Padmore, music director of the Harrogate and Wakefield choirs and conductor of this performance.

And what a glorious sound the massed choirs made! Rarely can Verdi's terrifying setting of the Dies irae have been unleashed with such force and with such spine tingling ferocity, even in Leeds Town Hall - the setting for many distinguished performances of Verdi's masterpiece.

But it was more than just the volume of sound and refinement of tone that places this new body of singers in the ranks of Yorkshire's finest.

The unanimity of attack was equally impressive and so were the articulation of the text, shading of dynamics and precise pitching of notes - qualities abundantly evident in the unaccompanied section of the Libera me.

Soprano Naomi Harvey (stepping in for an indisposed Lynne Dawson), mezzo soprano Gaynor Keeble, tenor Bonaventura Bottone and bass Ben Davies made up a fine, integrated quartet of soloists. Manchester Camerata provided a richly coloured orchestral backdrop with some incandescent brass and sweet-toned woodwind.

The strings had to compensate for their lack of numbers by focusing on volume rather than warmth or depth of sound. A string section of 28 players is really not enough for Verdi's Requiem in this space.

Andrew Padmore displayed mastery of the structure of this vast work, tending towards slower tempi to emphasise scale and grandeur.

In fact, at over 90 minutes running time, this was one of the longest performances of the Requiem that I can recall.

A question of interpretation of course but I am more critical of the unfortunate decision to insert an interval of 25 minutes mid-way through - such a pity to interrupt the flow and the concentration of both musicians and audience.

10:47am Thursday 12th June 2008

By Geoffrey Mogridge

Feel the power in Requiem

Verdi's 'Requiem'
Leeds Town Hall
Saturday, June 7.

WAKEFIELD EXPRESS Friday June 13 2008

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DESCRIBED by Brahms as 'a work of genius', Verdi's *Requiem* is a sacred work which is often said to contain some of the loudest unamplified music ever written.

And there were times during last Saturday's performance in Leeds Town Hall when I thought the beautifully ornate, vaulted ceiling of the capacious auditorium might be rent asunder in true biblical fashion by the titanic surges in volume projected by the musicians below.

This deeply moving yet stirring *Requiem*, amazingly written by an agnostic composer, is more dramatic than devotional, and more operatic than liturgical - features which were exploited to wonderful effect by the 300-strong Yorkshire Voices made up of Harrogate Choral Society and The Yorkshire Philharmonic Choir with Leeds Met Singers, accomplished soloists, and Manchester Camerata orchestra.

The orchestra's timpanist Janet Fulton and percussionist Mike Harper were pivotal in their vigorous contributions to this musical drama staged between Heaven and Hell, and whether it was in the fiery *dies irae*, the elegiac *lacrymosa*, or the deeply entrancing *Libera Me*, Naomi Harvey (soprano), Gaynor Keeble (mezzo soprano), Bonaventura Bottone (tenor), and Ben Davies (bass) lent finely-honed vocal expression to man's plea to Omnipotence for salvation beyond death.

Conducted with great authority yet sensitivity by maestro Andrew Padmore, this immensely powerful performance of Verdi's *Requiem*, perhaps more a mass for the living than the dead, was greeted on conclusion with sustained, rapturous applause and is sure to be remembered by the delighted audience as one of the highlights of the year's musical calendar.

ROBERT COWAN

www.harrogateadvertiser.net

Friday, June 13, 2008

Harrogate Choral Society - Yorkshire Voices.

THE Verdi Requiem is a massive undertaking for any choir. On Saturday, June 6 the Harrogate Choral Society joined forces with the Wakefield based Yorkshire Philharmonic Choir and the Leeds Met Singers to give a performance of this great work at the Leeds Town Hall. And with what success!

The male voices benefited from the greater numbers enabling them, for once, to match the sopranos and altos.

The thunderous sounds of the *Dies Irae* stirred the well-filled hall, but no less impressive was the delicacy and precision of the quieter moments in the *Libera Me* and the interplay of the eight parts in the *Hosanna*.

These choristers rarely have the opportunity to sing with an orchestra of the first rank and they were particularly fortunate to have the Manchester

Choristers rise to an important occasion

Camerata in such splendid form.

The string playing excelled, most of all in the *Lux aeterna* where the soft shimmering sounds so beautifully portray celestial serenity and, of course, who can resist the trumpet calls and the big bass drum as they summon up divine judgment!

The Requiem gives such prominence to the soloists and makes such vocal and dramatic demands on them, that it requires singers of international standing and, given the character of the work, preferably with operatic experience.

We were not to be disap-

pointed. The tenor Bonaventura Bottone, a veteran of the English National Opera, sang eloquently with a true Italianate timbre; The warm bass voice of Ben Davies rolled out above the orchestra. And there was a spiritual quality in the performance of mezzo Gaynor Keeble, as she drew inspiration from the words, as well as the musical line.

Naomi Harvey, the soprano, was a late replacement for the indisposed Lynne Dawson and if she had difficulties projecting some of the lower lying recitative-like passages, she was able to spin out some exquisitely soft high notes, her voice melding well with those of the other soloists.

This performance was, above all, a triumph for the conductor Andrew Padmore.

Quite apart from the meticulous preparation of the choirs, his assured interpretation of the piece combined excitement with inner strength and calm reflection.

Anthony Ogus

YORKSHIRE POST

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FRIDAY JUNE 13 2008

CLASSICAL

Yorkshire Voices

Town Hall, Leeds

David Denton ★★☆☆

THE debut of a large chorus is a rare event, and with almost 300 voices on stage, Yorkshire Voices exceeded hopes and expectations in Verdi's *Requiem*.

Drawn from three local choral groups, the hushed opening told of scrupulous preparation; the sheer weight of tone in the *Dies Irae* was awesome. The spacious view of the conductor, Andrew Padmore, was a valid and devotional approach that had the virtue of unravelling textures in the Town Hall's unhelpful acoustic, his more virile moments finding his singers alert and agile.

Understaffed in the lower strings, the modest forces of the Manchester Camerata gave spirited support, weighing in with forceful brass in the dramatic passages, but were too easily overpowered.

The soprano, Naomi Harvey, has a most beautiful voice, saving up sufficient vocal stamina for a final desperate plea to the Lord. The much-experienced tenor, Bonaventura Bottone, brought a touch of Italy.

