

REVIEW

THE HARROGATE PROM - Harrogate International Centre

On Saturday 19th May, Harrogate celebrated in style. Harrogate knows how to celebrate and, more importantly, Harrogate knows how to celebrate itself. The celebration concerned was the 25th anniversary of the opening of the HIC and the event was a memorable prom concert that was enjoyed by an audience filling up 85% of the seats of this large auditorium.

The event demonstrated, probably above all, how the venue is for local people and international stars alike. Into the latter category came the young tenor Alfie Boe, whose rapid and meteoric rise to fame is entirely justified. Singing six Italian songs, mostly from opera of the late-Romantic period, he demonstrated both gentle tenderness and impressive power in a wide vocal range of tone colour. Particularly effective was the climax at the end of the famous *Nessum Dorma* from Puccini's *Turandot* – just a few spine-tingling bars that will live long in the memories of those present. Boe was able to build up some rapport with the audience and came across as unassuming and down-to-earth. He deserves to rise to the very top and, on this showing, surely will do so.

The local talent was provided by Harrogate Choral Society who, appropriately, also performed at the Centre's opening in 1982. Their contribution to this concert consisted of music spanning about 225 years and began with Britten's arrangement of the *National Anthem*; this consists of two verses in two different keys in two different moods, these contrasts being vividly exaggerated on this occasion. Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* was performed suitably slower than usual and more effective in consequence. *Hallelujah*, from Handel's *Messiah*, also revealed the choir's adaptability in some most imaginative usage of a wide range of dynamics. Throughout their performances, both alone and with Boe, their diction was outstanding and the balance between the sections well-nigh perfect.

The notoriously difficult acoustics of the HIC were overcome by the choir being placed much further forward than is usually the case. This meant that their projection was not a problem for the audience and the most sympathetic accompaniment provided by the Chameleon Arts Orchestra helped also. The orchestra's chance to shine in its own right came in performances of well-known music by Elgar and members of the Strauss family. The ensemble played effectively in the varied stylistic demands of the repertoire and particularly notable were brief solo passages from accomplished individuals in the woodwind section.

The Choral Society's conductor, Andrew Padmore, directed the whole evening with vigour, energy and a passion for the music as well as the occasion itself, the latter being exemplified by him amusingly flashing his Union Jack waistcoat as the celebrations reached their climax. Marilynne Davies stylishly compèred the whole evening, embellishing the programme with anecdotes and insights into the journey that had made the event possible.

The finale of the evening consisted of the four pieces that have become so familiar to all Prom fans. Choir and audience alike waved their programmes, emblazoned with union jacks on the back cover, while singing Arne's *Rule Britannia*, and the evening ended with not one, but two, renditions of Parry's *Jerusalem*. Rarely can an audience have left the Centre so fulfilled.

Paul Dyson