



HARLOW CHORUS THROWS A CHRISTMAS CAROL PARTY

On Saturday evening in Thaxted Church, Harlow Chorus gave a Carol Concert by Candlelight that, with the energetic encouragement of their conductor, Alexander Chaplin, became more of an early Christmas party than a concert.

A rich mix of the traditional and the new, seasonal brass and party pieces on the piano; even a recitation and an impromptu chorus sight reading test made for a warm and joyful evening.

Those invited to the party, included the Harlow Chorus Academy under their Director Janette Ruocco (also notably on cymbals!) Susan Graham Smith on piano, Rob Farrer percussion, Pat Dodds and Oliver Carey Trumpet, Ed Mills Horn, Hari Eustice Trombone and Edd Leech Tuba.

The brass ensemble introduced both halves of the concert with short and delightful medleys.

The Chorus began the concert with a brief but magical setting of the Chant based "O Magnum Mysterium" from the American composer Morten Lauridsen. All the familiar quality of Harlow Chorus was immediately evident. A wonderful layering of rich harmony on firm cushion from the basses and the ability to build to a dynamic climax with no audible joins. Beth Hutchings from the Chorus had the daunting but essential task of singing solo the first verse of "Once In Royal David's City" then the audience and assembled forces entered once more this magical season of song and worship.

Much of what followed has by now become so familiar to all of us but Alexander Chaplin had ensured enough variety to keep the audience 'on song' and on the edge of their seats. Christus Natus Est a setting of five carols by the talented British composer Cecilia McDowall was new to most of the hall though many of the tunes rang a bell or two.

Vocally the Czech folk tune based "Zither Carol" and John Rutter's ever popular "Jesus Child" seemed to most engage the Chorus and the audience. We had a couple of gospels, a delightful French carol and a rousing version of Gaudete, the 16th century classic that seemed to capture best of all the spirit and purpose of the evening with its infectious rhythm and totally appropriate opening lines "rejoice rejoice Christ is born of the Virgin Mary rejoice."

Mention must be made of the spirited rendering of John Betjeman's 'Christmas' poem (complete with perambulations and props) by Jonathan Bayly and the inspired inclusion of the transcription for piano duet of three movements from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite played by Susan Graham Smith and Alexander Chaplin. A rich mix indeed and a great spirit of goodwill prevailed. A warm start to the Christmas season that more than made up for the loss of last years concert, due to snow.

David Batterbee Monday 19th December