

## Monmouth Choral Society Review [11<sup>th</sup> December 2010]

Monmouth Choral Society thrilled a capacity audience at St Mary's Priory Church with a well-crafted performance of Parts 1, 2, 5 & 6 of Bach's great masterpiece, the *Christmas Oratorio*. The work (confidently sung in its original German), dates from 1734 and celebrates Christmas, the New Year and Epiphany. Bach draws on the Gospels of St Luke and St Matthew to tell the story and interweaves some very inventive and imaginative arias and choruses to illuminate the text.

The attentive choir sang with assurance, but there was occasionally some lack of clarity in the more intricate part writing. The contrasting moods in *Ehre Sie Gott (Glory to God)*, were particularly well captured. Conductor Huw Williams skilfully united the forces with well chosen tempos, characterising both the dance-like movements and the reflective chorales.

The four vocal soloists impressed, meeting the composer's exacting demands with ease. Stephen Jeffes provided a clear reading in his role of the Evangelist and was eloquent in the Tenor Arias. Soprano Lucy Bowen sang with fervour. Catherine Hopper excelled in the alto arias, singing *Schlafe, mein Liebster (Sleep my Dearest)* with great tenderness. Jonathan Arnold's Bass voice is well suited to Baroque music, and he gave an eminent account of *Grosse Herr (Mighty Lord)*.

The Bristol Ensemble Baroque Band (Leader Alison Bury) made an imposing debut. From the jubilant opening movement with the brilliance of trumpets and timpani, to the exquisite *Sinfonia*, and the virtuoso instrumental solos, the players always ensured magnificent support on period instruments.

Overall, a truly uplifting concert to start the Christmas season.

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[Dr Keith Ellerington]