

## Monmouth Choral Society Review [2<sup>nd</sup> October 2010]

In their opening concert of the season, Monmouth Choral Society delighted an appreciative audience with two works written 150 years apart.

The concert opened with a Requiem by a composer not often featured by the choir, Maurice Duruflé. Early twentieth century French musicians were greatly influenced by Gregorian chant and Duruflé was no exception. He had been composing a set of organ pieces on the *Mass for the Dead* when he was commissioned to write a Requiem. Not surprisingly, he took this as the material for the commissioned work, adding some sophisticated modern harmonies.

A challenge for the choir in this piece is to produce a seamless flow of music, which was creditably achieved on Saturday evening at St Mary's Priory Church, Monmouth. There was a good line with a balance of forceful singing and subtle restraint. Bass soloist Stuart Young added a richness to the texture in *Domine Jesu Christe* and *Libera Me*, and Soprano soloist Philippa Hyde (together with the obbligato solo cellist) gave an exquisite performance of the *Pie Jesu*. Throughout, the performance was supported by the skilful organ playing of Jeffrey Howard.

In the second half, both MCS and the Regency Sinfonia (Leader: Laurence Kempton), were on more familiar territory – Haydn's *Nelson Mass*. Although it is unlikely that Haydn wrote the work in 1798 with Lord Nelson in mind, the mass was performed to honour the great mariner during his visit to Esterhazy with Sir William and Lady Hamilton in the 1800s, prior to the trio's historic visit to Monmouth in 1802.

Haydn's original title, "*Mass in Troubled Times*", uses text from the Latin Mass and possibly reflects the mood of the Napoleonic Wars. From the opening *Kyrie*, with its use of trumpets and drums, conductor Huw Williams expertly captured a military mood. Later, the exultant praise of the *Gloria* and the fast paced and joyous *Et Resurrexit* showed the choir at its most exuberant.

The sublime singing of the splendid solo quartet in the *Agnus Dei*, where the Soprano and Bass were joined by Stephen Taylor (Alto) and Andrew Yeats (Tenor) provided an emotional contrast to the triumphant singing of the choir in the *Dona Nobis Pacem* that brought one of the composer's greatest works to an exciting close.

I look forward to hearing this expressively disciplined choir in their performance of the Bach Christmas Oratorio in December.

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[Dr Keith Ellerington]