

Monmouth Choral Society Review [2nd April 2011]

St Mary's Priory Church, Monmouth, was the setting on Saturday 2nd April 2011 for Monmouth Choral Society's Spring Concert '*Make a Joyful Noise*'.

The Choir, in a programme designed to appeal to a wide variety of musical tastes, excelled in a range of music by British and American composers.

Musical Director Huw Williams chose to open and close with challenging works by Britten and Bernstein. In both *Rejoice in the Lamb* and the *Chichester Psalms*, the choir was not always as one when singing either the unconventional poetry of Christopher Smart or the text from the Book of Psalms. The tenors and basses were perhaps hindered by their distance from the conductor. Generally though, the choir managed the complex rhythms effectively and coped well with the tonal demands to present an assured performance. A particular highlight was the singing of the famous 23rd Psalm (*The Lord is My Shepherd*) by boy treble Rory Turnbull.

The Choir shone in the first UK performance of *Poemas de Amor* written by American composer Stephen Paulus in 2007. The playing of the solo marimba added greatly to the overall effect in these medieval love songs, which fuse Spanish text, Latin rhythm and jazz harmonies. British composer Tarik O'Regan's 2004 *Dorchester Canticles* likewise impressed in the choral blend and in the exuberance of the ending.

The guest soprano soloist was Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama graduate Siân Winstanley, who won the Monmouth Choral Society's Singing Prize whilst a student. In Rodrigo's *Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios* the large appreciative audience was reminded of the different facets of love. In Britten's Cabaret Songs – *Calypso and Johnny* – and Bernstein's *Glitter and be Gay* from *Candide*, we were treated to a dazzling display of coloratura singing and excellent dramatic characterisation.

An attractive feature throughout the evening was the rich instrumental accompaniment presented by percussionists Owain Williams and Diggory Seacome, harpist Catherine White, and by Jeffrey Howard who played the organ and piano with immense skill, flair and imagination.

[Dr Keith Ellerington]