

*Review of our Dvorak and Schumann concert*

Tuesday 21st November, 2017

As a former schoolteacher, examiner – and now reviewer – it's always vital to remain objective where any assessments are involved.

Of course, as individual human beings it's inevitable that we might warm to some more readily than to others, but we have to put this behind us, when holding the reviewer's pencil – rather like the examiner who is encouraged to say 'Thank You' to every response in the exam, even when they know that response to be wrong.

Having acknowledged that, I am still at liberty to say how much I particularly enjoy reviewing Three Spires Singers in the lovely surroundings of Truro Cathedral. Everyone is so very welcoming, I get the best seat in the house, and they're an excellent choir under Cathedral Director of Music, Chris Gray, with an orchestra to match, led by Pauline Lowbury.

On this occasion they were also joined by four stunning young soloists, one of whom was our own David Webb, now making a real name for himself in the capital, but initially a chorister at Truro, and head chorister at Exeter Cathedrals.

[It was]"One of Three Spires Singers' finest shorter-work performances, and again one where, despite all the rigorous and well-disciplined preparation beforehand, it was still imbued with such a palpable sense of spontaneous enjoyment on the night."

Everyone was on top form in Haydn's *Insanae et Vanae Curae*, and Dvořák's lovely *Stabat Mater*, and Schumann's much-loved Piano Concerto, with local soloist Paul Comeau, provided some welcome contrast to the vocal music on offer – a format they adopt, from time to time, instead of devoting the whole evening to a much longer single choral piece.

"The quality of the soprano section is surely still one of the choir's greatest assets. High notes are never swooped, no single voice stands out, and the overall attack ensures that all entries are well-timed and precise. Likewise, they have clearly been taught to listen implicitly to the prevailing harmony, so that pitch shows no signs of sagging at any point, even when unaccompanied."

"The final accolade must go to the expertise of conductor Christopher Gray, both during the rehearsal stage and on the night, in bringing everything together as one, from the superb choral singing and orchestral playing to the telling soloists' contributions."

In fact, you might sum the whole evening up just by two words in the vernacular: 'Proper Job!'

Philip Buttall

All quotes from Philip Buttall's longer review in "*Scene and Heard International*"