

## Three Spires Singers & Orchestra Works by Pascoe, Strauss and Verdi Truro Cathedral

Review by Judith Whitehouse.

AN UNSEASONABLY cold evening, but a warm buzz of excitement as the cathedral filled up for Three Spires' world premiere of Russell Pascoe's secular Requiem, coupled with two works which, as Dean Roger Bush ominously warned in his introductory remarks, had been their respective composers' last.

Verdi's Te Deum, like his much longer Requiem, has more than a hint of the opera house, so the lurch from restrained plainsong introduction into brassy fanfares and red-blooded eight-part chorus wasn't too much of a surprise; the choir, directed by Christopher Gray, making the most of the dramatic and dynamic contrasts. A fine tribute to Verdi in the 200th anniversary of his birth.

Richard Strauss's final offering in his long lifetime affair with the soprano voice, the Four Last Songs, was given a radiant and refreshing performance by Sarah Fox – from the first crescendo in Fruhling to her extended phrases on a single breath there was a glorious liquid stream of sound.

The orchestral accompaniment was similarly inspired with glowing horn solos from Jacqueline Kershaw, ecstatic flute and piccolo bird calls and Malcolm Latchem's soaring violin solo perfectly echoed by the soprano.

Amazingly, Malcolm was a member of the Philharmonia in Schwarzkopf's recording of this work over 50 years ago.

For many listeners, myself included, this work arouses emotions which mere vocabulary cannot adequately convey – this performance was like one of those perfect sunsets which long remain in the memory.

For Russell Pascoe's eagerly awaited work, there was the added bonus of programme essays by him and Professor Anthony Pinching, who assembled the libretto not to mention a practical seminar in January, which gave a valuable introduction and context to this unique concept.

From the first thoughtful sounds of Donne's No Man Is An Island contrasted with the searing language of Wilfred Owen, it was clear that this was not just a string of obvious death poems set in obvious ways.

Noted soloist Catherine Wyn-Rogers and Stephen Roberts duetted vigorously in a powerful almost canonic Hardy setting and made splendid solo contributions.

If I single out Cats And Cakes with its rumbustious brass and meowing strings, it's because Catherine Wyn-Rogers' personification of a spirit's domestic anxieties delighted the audience.

In Dylan Thomas's Do Not Go Gentle the chorus coped magnificently with Pascoe's demonic whirlwind writing – Chris Gray's meticulous preparation and direction to the fore here – and I suspect some choirs are already looking at the irresistibly melodic Stevenson and Thomas Moore.

In the final section, a Whitman setting drawing together the musical motifs which permeate the work, leading to Anthony Pinching's own Seasons, an affirmative mood is established leading to a massive climax with a whole canteen of percussion – it could have been a cliché but it worked for me, and for the huge audience, who rose to their feet in one of the most prolonged and noisy ovations in the cathedral for some time.

Russell Pascoe's Requiem is undoubtedly a work of stature, worthy of repeat performances, and all who were involved in this premiere deserve massive congratulations and thanks for a truly magnificent and moving occasion.

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