

RYDE CHORUS – AN EVENING OF BAROQUE MUSIC

Saturday 25th November 2023

We gathered in All Saints' Church, Ryde, on Saturday for an evening of Baroque Music performed by the Ryde Chorus along with four vocal soloists and with guest instrumental musicians. It was a cold night outside, while inside the church we received a warm welcome to this special concert of music from the 17th and early 18th centuries.

The Musical Director, Jurgita Leistrumaitė, had arranged the programme in an unusual but extremely effective order. The evening started with each of the soloists singing an aria, accompanied on the piano by James Longford – a clever way to introduce our ears and our minds to the sounds of this period of music, and also for the singers to present themselves individually to the audience. Soprano Tressa Lambert opened with an impassioned and sonorous rendering of "*Il mio bel foco*" by the Italian composer Marcello. This opening aria was followed by the alto Patricia Hammond (Patricia had taken over from Morag Boyle who was unable to be there); she sang J.S. Bach's solo church cantata "*Vergnugte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust*" with beautiful phrasing, balancing with the complex lines in the accompaniment. Next we heard a Handel aria in English "*Waft her, angels, through the skies*" sung by tenor Sam Leggett, and we all enjoyed hearing the words clearly in Sam's tuneful open voice. The last of the four singers was local 19-year-old baritone Aaron Briggs, singing Alessandro Scarlatti's aria "*Gia il sole dal Gange*", with a lyrical and uplifting manner.

After this, James Longford crossed the chancel to play J.S. Bach's magnificent Prelude & Fugue in B minor, and the audience paid full attention to the way the melodic and harmonic strands weaved and developed to the final cadence.

Then it was time for the Chorus to come on! The 25 voices began with J.S. Bach's Motet "*O Jesu Christ, meins Lebens Licht*", singing the German words with an immediate feel for the style and emotion of the music, and with a conscious listening to each other and an awareness of the overall sound and the resulting chords. The choir ended the first half of the concert with a rousing rendition of what was probably the most well-known piece of the programme: "*And the glory of the Lord*" from Handel's *Messiah*, accompanied by the organ. They felt the ongoing pulse well, and the sopranos easily reached their top notes.

After the interval, the music moved back 100 years from *Messiah* (composed in 1741) to "*Beatus vir*" by the Italian composer Monteverdi, which was published in 1640. The choir was now accompanied by violins, violas, a double bass, and a chamber organ continuo - so it was a very different sound-world and musical idiom. There was a bright bouncy pace with rhythmic and coordinated playing from the strings, and a clear articulation of the Latin text and good focus and tuning from the choir, who seemed to be enjoying this psalm-setting from the early part of the Baroque period. The audience were most appreciative too.

Then two pieces by the German composer Buxtehude: a well-learned and precise performance of the "*Alleluia*" from one of his cantatas, followed by his splendid "*Magnificat*" for chorus - together with the four soloists we had met earlier. There were delightful duets from the soloists, and assured declamatory words and rhythms from the choir.

The final movement of the evening, again for the Chorus and the soloists, took us back into the 18th century with Vivaldi's large-scale "*Credo in G*". An oboist joined the instrumental group, somehow making the accompaniment sound like a small orchestra. Each part of the text was sung with full appreciation of the sacred words, with lovely suspensions in the chromatic sections and a particularly affecting setting for soprano and alto of the "*Crucifixus*" words. The *Credo* - and the concert - ended with a resounding almost fugal "Amen".

It was an inspiring evening, and I am sure that everyone was moved to have been there to listen to this repertoire. Many congratulations to the Chorus, and to their Musical Director who certainly enabled them to show their very best. Thanks also to the wonderful instrumental musicians. I left the church feeling that I had received a present of the music, which I could treasure.

Claire Sharples