

REVIEW OF RUTTER & FAURE CONCERT

25 March 2006

Ripon Cathedral: Harrogate Choral Society, Andrew Padmore

An imaginatively-programmed concert that combined completely different styles of music as well as different types of choirs took place with considerable success in Ripon Cathedral on Saturday 25th March in front of a virtually-capacity audience. Harrogate Choral Society were joined, for two works by John Rutter, by the 11-13 year-olds of the Junior Choir of St John Fisher High School. Although initially trained by June Garbutt, this group, who sang commendably from memory throughout the first (lengthy) work, had been very thoroughly prepared by Rachel Brooks.

Mass of the Children begins with an exposed opening for the children to which they responded very well although it became evident later that the strength of the alto line, reinforced by the presence of boys (who have the stronger voices in this age group) led to some slightly ill-balanced sections. Rutter's music showed his enthusiasm for writing lovely melodic lines and Hannah Grove Atherton's soprano solo voice floated over the other 150 voices, especially in the *Christe Eleison*, with effortless ease, although she did not always project quite so well when singing alone. The adult choir were most impressive in the *a capella* passages and understood well the reflective mood of this work. Although the *Gloria* was, appropriately, the only section to display any semblance of rhythmic vitality – the forces seizing this opportunity with relish – the choirs combined to forge a thrillingly executed climax in the final section.

Rutter's *Feel the Spirit* is an arrangement of seven spirituals in contrasting moods with four up-beat numbers alternating with three more thoughtful songs. Rutter's amazing imagination extended to jazz-style instrumentation with the outstanding Amici Ensemble producing a range of accompaniments always sympathetic to the needs of the overall effect. Despite the tenors and basses rushing their entry at the opening of *Joshua fit de Battle*, the Choral Society was in fine form, displaying excellent diction and often entering into the spirit of the work by swaying. The whole work was given considerable impetus by mezzo-soprano Melanie Marshall whose charismatic presence made everyone feel that they were involved in a performance of considerable enjoyment. This was exemplified in a repeat of the final setting, *When the Saints*, in which the audience were, unusually but appropriately, encouraged to join in. That concluded the children's choir's contribution to the concert and their enthusiasm had shone throughout.

The concert concluded with the setting of the *Requiem* by Fauré. The lyrical approach from bass soloist Ben Davies fitted in well with Andrew Padmore's interpretation which used the original (reduced) orchestration. His choice of the *tempi* of some sections was slightly quicker than is usual but the Choral Society sang with much feeling for the work's style and Atherton's *Pie Jesu* was performed movingly lyrically.

Andrew Padmore is obviously bringing his own brand and style of musicianship to the Harrogate area. Long may it continue.

Paul Dyson