

Handel's *Messiah* in Kingston

Those who were fortunate enough to be in All Saints' Parish Church on Saturday 6 December were delighted to hear Handel's *Messiah* in fine fettle and moving form. The evening was given by the Thames Philharmonic Choir with the Thames Festival Orchestra, accompanied on organ by Stephen Disley, and ably and sensitively directed as usual by John Bate. This performance was characterised by a freshness and lightness of touch, and an attention to phrasing and dynamic. This combined with enough restrained operatic embellishment and 'acting' to tell the familiar story with unusual integrity and force.

After the orchestral 'Sinfonia', the tenor soloist Adam Tunnicliffe drew us into the opening recitatives and aria conveying, with direct clarity and precision, the prophecies of Isaiah. This was followed by bass soloist Samuel Evans with true Welsh passion shaking us indeed with 'refiner's fire'. His quality of voice was lighter than some bass soloists can be, and so was especially competent in the challenging pace of this judgement section. Great! We were drawn in....

Heather Shipp, contralto/mezzo soloist told us of birth, while the relentlessness in the Choir's 'For unto us a child is born' conveyed that occasion. Marie Jaermann, soprano soloist, set the atmosphere with her first recitatives and aria: her purity of tone perfectly suited to the angelic announcements. The Choir's precision in the first chorus was to hold throughout the oratorio, setting the standard throughout. Joyous was the following section, as Heather Shipp, joined the soprano to 'Rejoice greatly'. Small details like the little squirl from the organ at 'leap as a hart' made this musical interpretation delightful and notable throughout the evening.

After the interval, in the Passion section, Choir and soloists rose to the intensity: again, action and movement was the key, and 'Why do the nations so furiously rage together?' was well illustrated in the 'struggle' of orchestral rush and bass soloist theatre.

The familiar 'Hallelujah' chorus and 'I know that my redeemer liveth' aria enhanced the eternal promise and hope of resurrection in the final section: 'mystery' and trumpet sealed the story, the Choir deepening their tone somehow as the great 'Amen' ended this exceptional evening.

This was a special performance, to be remembered!

Woodroffe
7 December 2014

Marilyn (Em)