

## **GRAYSHOTT CONCERTS – Vivaldi Gloria -16 Feb 2008**

Grayshott's new Chamber Choir – Excelsis – gave its inaugural concert to a packed, enthusiastic audience on Saturday in St Luke's church. The choir was formed in October by its director, Robert Lewis and is a well-balanced group, showing a lively appreciation of rhythmic vigour and an impressive control over a wide dynamic range. All this was demonstrated to great effect in Vivaldi's Gloria where the singing was fresh and responsive – intonation, articulation and diction were excellent. The choir is blessed with a superb soprano line.

An unusual feature of the programme was the plainsong Kyrie which preceded the Vivaldi Gloria. This was beautifully sung by the choir, sounding flexible and mellifluous with not a note out of place.

The choir showed a good balance between ecstasy and restraint in Fauré's Cantique de Jean Racine – this was a refined, sensuous account in excellent French.

Excelsis gave subtle choral support in Mozart's Laudate Dominum. The soloist – Judith Howarth – is an internationally renowned opera singer but her powerful voice is quite unsuited to this work, as indeed it was for Pergolesi's Stabat Mater where she was partnered by Yvonne Fontane. Stylistically both singers were too refulgent for this Baroque gem.

Judith Howarth coped well with the bravura writing of Vivaldi's Nulla in mundo pax sincera, but the high tessitura of the closing Alleluia tested her to the limit as she found it difficult to articulate the semiquaver runs cleanly.

The accompaniment for all these items was provided by members of the New London Sinfonia, which sounded a little bass heavy.

So, an excellent debut concert by Excelsis. I shall watch their progress with keen anticipation and look forward to hearing them again very soon.

Ann Pinhey

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