

Draft review of concert at Romsey Abbey by Bournemouth Bach Choir & Orchestra

On 13 June Romsey Abbey was fortunate, indeed, to experience some wonderful music-making from Bournemouth Bach Choir & Orchestra - on their first visit to this venue. The Abbey provides a superb setting for baroque ecclesiastical music. The program comprised three pieces written in the period 1715-30: Vivaldi's *Gloria*, Bach's *Magnificat*, and Lotti's rarely performed *Mass of discernment*.

The precise conducting by Tim Hooper was finely judged to meet the acoustic idiosyncrasies of The Abbey. Thus the soft repetitions of musical ideas were effectively performed in a slightly detached manner. The phrasing, tempi, and dynamics, were beautifully nuanced. The chamber-choir (50 singers) attacked precisely, and maintained consistent pitch.

The four principal soloists were Abbi Temple (soprano), Katie Bray (mezzo-soprano), John Porter (tenor), & Jonathan Prentice (bass). They produced musical performances, and their timbres blended well - but operatic bias sometimes produced excessive vibrato for baroque works, or volumetric imbalance.

The *ad hoc* baroque band (20 instrumentalists) were not playing baroque instruments, but with sensitive articulation and ornamentation they provided a stylistic and exciting sound. With harder sticks the timpani could have imparted a greater rhythmic steadiness at the start of the *Magnificat*.

There was sparkling orchestral solo-work, and sensitive accompanying (which contrasted effectively with some lively choruses). The smooth *basso continuo* was provided by an electronic keyboard plus a bassoon, cello, and/or double-bass.

The whole concert was obviously enjoyed by all: musicians and audience alike. This ensemble's excellent performances in Wessex are a treat that deservedly draws audiences from a wide region. Their next concert is at Christchurch Priory on 17 October, which will feature Rutter's rarely performed *Mass of the children* (with the distinguished Highcliffe Junior Choir).