

Music and Merriment 7 December 2024

The Music and Merriment concert took place at St Mary's church on Saturday 7 December after a day riven by the blustery winds of Storm Darragh. The weather forecast of the previous day was so severe that the organisers had drafted a cancellation plan. In the event, there was some rain mixed with the gusts of wind earlier in the day, when final rehearsals took place, but little rain in the evening.

And the audience came, to our delight, and we had a slightly bigger audience than 2023, although we know that some people, particularly older ones, were indeed deterred and stayed safe at home.

Tony Bish told the audience how to escape in case of fire, and the lights went down. We were enchanted in the darkness by the Junior Choir marching up the aisle, lighted by their glowsticks, and singing

the first two verses of 'Once in Royal David's City', led by William Bishop, who directed both the Junior Choir and the local adult choir, the Winkfield Chorale.



Our big annual celebration of Christmas was thus well underway, with its 16 varied items all presented by local people, including a few seasoned pros. Len Tyler, who conducted and wrote the music for the '5 T's Brass' quintet that came second in the programme, wrote afterwards: "Congratulations for last night's Music and Merriment concert. A lovely event with real live music in a lovely church. Such a good thing to do."

The Junior Choir followed a humorous reading by John Edwards, and sang three Christmas songs, directed by William, including a jazzy fantasy song, the 'Star Express' taking travellers to Bethlehem to see baby Jesus. This was followed by Anthony Hodson's little 'Song of the Shepherds' who are astonished and confused to be the first to see baby Jesus, and they dance a jig of joy in the refrain.

The next performer was 10-year-old Freddie Fryer Bovill, a pupil at the choir school of St George's chapel, Windsor. He sang the well-known song 'Walking in the Air', from 'The Snowman', and his clear trained treble voice was enchanting. (He was accompanied on the piano by his mum Ali, who had sung many years back in this concert before it became 'Music and Merriment'.) Freddie had recently sung this song for the Wimbledon performance of the new travelling production of 'The Snowman'. (Google: Bovill Snowman)



Then the Winkfield Chorale sang two Christmas anthems, directed by William and accompanied by Richard Sedding, including Anthony's latest Christmas anthem 'Glorious light' in its very first public performance and sang it beautifully (a second performance came just three days later in Mercers' Hall in the City of London),



After that we were amazed by the virtuosity and musicianship of Sarah Aizawa on the violin, who had reached the age of 16 the week previous. She played the first movement of the violin concerto by Camille Saint-Saëns, the French late-romantic composer, alternating long lyrical passages with complex finger-work, and landing on a clear stratospheric B. Sarah is well known at international master-classes, and is a yearly feature, living not far from Winkfield. John Sayer was 'the orchestra' on the piano and did a superb job of sensitive and virtuosic support.

The concert proceeded with 'Away in a manger' as an audience carol, followed by Jill Glennerster and the St Mary's Handbell ringers, performing Christmas pieces with crisp enthusiasm, and ending with a spirited 'Jingle Bells'.

Everybody relaxed for the interval, with delicious mince pies provided by the Women's Guild, washed down by mulled wine for the adults and lemonade for the younger people.

With refreshed voices, the second half of the concert started with 'O Come all ye Faithful'. The Junior Choir sang the shepherd's verse, and the organ was augmented by 5Ts Brass, notably the high trumpet descant played by John Sayer, on the trumpet this time.

Next was Sarah Parker, a brilliant saxophonist who is a member of the Woodley Concert Band with 5Ts brass members (as is Anthony). Her lyrical piece 'Cantilène et Danse' by French 20th century composer Denis Joly drew out the rich singing tonality of the instrument, before the lively Danse enabled her to display her fine technique.



John and Caroline Kimbell were then supported by William with two witty take-offs of church singing, the second being the famous 'The Weather Forecast' sung to an Anglican chant. Then 'Holst's beautiful 'In the Bleak Mid-Winter' followed as an audience carol.

The Winkfield Chorale sang three more Christmas pieces, directed by William, finishing with Willcock's 'different' high-speed choral setting of Jingle Bells, a real tonsil-twister. This was followed by Sue Bish with a charming reading from Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol', about Mr Fezziwig's Christmas – a feast provided by a kind and generous business-man, with quill-pens and financial figures stowed well away, softening the heart of old Mr Scrooge seeing his much nice young self at this Christmas-happiness-filled party

Everybody sang a joyous 'Hark the herald angels sing' after a 5T's Brass fanfare, ending with the inspirational descanted third verse. And that was it.

Audience members gave generously to the leaving collection, and everybody carefully returned home through the wind. One Junior Choir member was reported as 'positively buzzing when she got home!'

We received lots of kind words about how much people had enjoyed the concert, and it was also a financial success, thanks to audience support and also generous sponsors for some of the costs.

More than 50 people performed at this unique concert, nearly all as unpaid amateurs, and we are deeply grateful, and we also thank warmly the kitchen helpers, the stage-management people, the front of house people, parking helpers, and also the Junior Choir parents who supported five hours of rehearsals by the children.

A good evening – thanks to all who supported St Mary's by coming.