

# Music

## Christmas Concert

*The Llewellyn Choir, Canberra School of Music, 13 December.*

Reviewed by Janet Wilson

Carols set the scene for Christmas and there are delightful elements of these in both of the contrasting works chosen to make up the Llewellyn Choir's Christmas concert.

The seventeenth century *Midnight Mass for Christmas* by Marc-Antoine Charpentier is a far cry from the solemn and sedate music often associated with liturgical celebration. The music of this Mass is based on traditional French carols to accompany the timeless Latin text of the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei. It is charmingly light music that makes the heart dance and gives a festive atmosphere.

The small chamber orchestra that accompanied the singers was perfect for the delicacy of the music. However, it provided no hiding place for some of the initially uncertain entries by the choir and left the unclear enunciation of the Latin words exposed. Nonetheless the joyous Kyrie rang out and led into a splendid Gloria. The singers moved comfortably with the atmosphere of the music.

The alternating sections for orchestra, choir, male trio and female duo make this work interesting. The soloists, sopranos Karen Bruce and Erika Tolano, counter tenor Daniel Goodwin, tenor Kent McIntosh and bass Tom Layton added to the atmosphere of pleasantly unaffected Christmas joy.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was in his eighties when he wrote *Hodie*, unaccountably seldom performed in Australia for a piece so full of compellingly glorious music.

The work is the essence of Englishness with traditional carols and settings of poems alternating with choral readings from the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. These readings are traditionally sung by a boys' choir to an organ accompaniment but on this occasion nine young women from Cantare, the *a cappella* vocal ensemble directed by Patricia Whitbread and Colin Forbes, filled this role and provided one of the highlights of this concert. The purity and tone of their voices which

blended together superbly and the clarity and crispness of their words were outstanding. Many more experienced ensembles could listen and take note of this group.

Two unaccompanied sections from the choir, the Chorals, *The blessed Son of God* and *No sad thought his soul afright* were beautiful examples of controlled tonal singing, while Kent McIntosh, singing the words of the Angel, had fine tone and clear enunciation. Erika Tolano had power and control aplenty to carry, *It was the winter wild*, in contrast to the seamless orchestral accompaniment and she captured the atmosphere of the beautiful Lullaby with its soft, rocking motion, perfectly. The resonance of Tom Layton's bass voice sat well with the accompanying lush orchestration in both *The Oxen* and *The shepherds sing*.

The dramatic *March of the Three Kings* created the atmosphere of an exhausting desert trek with a strong input of brass and percussion initially and died away at the end to a steady, plodding beat as it led into the unaccompanied Choral.

*Hodie* left the audience with a sense of satisfaction that a wonderful work had been splendidly performed. ■

*Janet Wilson is a freelance writer with a particular interest in music.*