

The Llewellyn Choir

4Tune Brass

Soloists: Rebecca Collins, soprano; Susan Ellis, mezzo-soprano

'Gloria'

Saturday 8th December 2007

7.30pm, St Christopher's Cathedral, Manuka

reviewed by Margaret Legge-Wilkinson

Being a Christmas concert, *Gloria*, presented by the **Llewellyn Choir** under the direction of Rowan Harvey-Martin was an occasion of bon-bons and treats. The bon-bons were the brass works performed by **4Tune Brass** led by Julie Watson and the treats were those exuberant works for choir one has come to know so well: Vivaldi's *Gloria* and English composer, John Rutter's work of the same name.

It was rather confusing that **4Tune Brass** did not perform its solos in the order of the program, however what they did perform was in general well-articulated, vivacious and mellow in turns. Thus, the concert began with Richard Wagner's *Fanfare II*, a cheerful welcoming opening performed by 4 trumpets in the loft at the back of the Cathedral and immediately followed by the full brass ensemble performing a work by Bruckner.

Dufay is a medieval French composer and his *Gloria ad modum tubae* is essentially a simple quietly joyful round. It was confidently sung by the choir, supported by the repeating bass of the trombone. **4Tune Brass**, conducted by Rowan Harvey-Martin, then performed *Canzone VIII* for double brass quartet by Giovanni Gabrieli, a noble courtly-sounding work with much use of the antiphonal effect of the divided brass ensemble.

The largest work of the concert followed, Vivaldi's *Gloria*, accompanied by a small instrumental ensemble led by the highly respected violinist, Barbara Gilby. Vivaldi's *Gloria*, while essentially an optimistic work, embraces the full gamut of emotions. Conductor, Rowan Harvey-Martin highlighted these contrasts to great effect.

After the declamatory, joyful 1st movement and the melancholy *Et in terra pax*, the voices of the soloists, soprano Rebecca Collins and mezzo-soprano Susan Ellis in their duet *Laudamus te*, soared angelically through the cathedral above the lilting, gentle accompaniment of the strings. Other memorable solo movements included the largo *Domine Deus, Rex coelestis* sung exquisitely by Rebecca Collins in duet with oboist, Megan Billings and the melancholy *Domine Deus, Agnus Dei* sung with passion by Susan Ellis.

The choir sang generally with confidence and high spirits although displaying a little raggedness in some of the faster movements. However, *Gloria* came to a jubilant end with brass joining forces with the choir and instrumental ensemble for an impressive final movement.

The second half of this festive concert opened with **4Tune Brass** performing 2 works by Gabrielli with clarity and ease, especially the fast, repeated notes by the trumpeters.

The choir was introduced again with a performance of *Te Deum* by Edward Elgar. Though well executed in parts and with strong accompaniment by organist, Peter Young, the work did not impress as much as the two *Glorias*, possibly because of a combination of moments of uncertainty by the choir and the fact that the work itself seems to lack clear direction.

This became more apparent with the performance of John Rutter's *Gloria*, a jubilant, noisy work which nevertheless, never loses its sense of momentum. The clamour is accounted for by the use of a multitude of percussion instruments including timpani, snare drum, cymbals and glockenspiel as well as organ and brass. The energy is there right from the start with a drumroll, crescendoing and joined by raucous off-beat brass and choir. The celebratory nature of the piece was well-captured by director Rohan Harvey-Martin and the choir and instrumentalists. There were some more introspective moments, such as the delicate organ accompaniment by Peter Young and later when the soloists, Rebecca Collins and Susan Ellis sang their ethereal duet. However the momentum was quickly recaptured with insistent syncopated rhythms from percussion and brass and choir and organ all propelled towards the exultant conclusion.