

LLEWELLYN CHOIR CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

Conductor: Rowan Harvey-Martin
Wesley Music Centre 19 December

Review by Len Power

It seemed a bit strange listening to Christmas music on a hot 36 degree evening in the church at the Wesley Music Centre, but the Llewellyn Choir under the masterful baton of Rowan Harvey-Martin soon took my mind off the hot weather.

Starting with the traditional 'Deo Gracias', arranged by Benjamin Britten, followed by the beautifully melodic 'Angel's Carol' by John Rutter, the choir sang with precision and great feeling. Canberra composer, Anthony Smith's 'Prologue from the Coventry Nativity Play' uses a rather turgid text but the music is superb and was sung very well by the choir.

The first major piece of the program was Respighi's 'Laud To The Nativity'. Soloists Greta Claringbould, Christina Wilson and Michael Martin were in fine voice soaring above the choir in this haunting work. The choir sang the harmonies with great accuracy and a pleasing depth, making it sound at times like it was a larger choir than it was.

Following the interval, the choir and soloists had great fun singing Argentinian, Ariel Ramirez' 'Navidad Nuestra'. Soloist baritone, Dominic Harvey shone with his fine singing and a touch of humour in his delivery and Rowan Harvey-Martin gave us a nicely judged amusing moment as she made a big deal of playing a South American percussive instrument as well as conducting. Marta Yebra on castanets, guitarist, Ariel Nurhadi and Jes Chalmers on percussion added fine additional Argentinian colour.

Surprise guest, composer Calvin Bowman, accompanied the choir on piano with his own short but beautiful piece, 'Noël' and the choir then gave us a magnificently sung 'Coventry Carol', arranged by Martin Shaw. This lovely work conjures up images of snowy Christmas cards and pretty European winters and was a perfect choice for a Christmas-themed concert. The final item was the carol, 'Silent Night' by Franz Grüber, arranged by John Rutter. Often these well-known carols can seem a bit over-familiar, but it was nicely sung by the choir and, when the audience was invited to join in singing, the effect was quite moving.

Anthony Smith's fine playing on the organ was especially notable as was his sensitive and pleasing accompaniment for the whole concert.

The Llewellyn Choir's choice of works was excellent, giving the audience some old favourites as well as lesser known items. This was a perfect concert to finish the year!