

Review / Tender is the flight to Egypt

Music / "L'Enfance du Christ", Llewellyn Choir. Conducted by Rowan Harvey-Martin. At Wesley Uniting Church, Forrest, Saturday, December 16. Reviewed by LEN POWER



Llewellyn choristers.

"L'ENFANCE du Christ" (The Childhood of Christ) is an oratorio by Hector Berlioz, based on the Holy Family's flight into Egypt.

First performed in Paris in 1854, the work is in three distinct sections. The first part details King Herod ordering the death of newborn children in Judaea and the second shows the Holy Family – Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus – leaving for Egypt to escape the death threat. In the third part, the family finds refuge in the Egyptian town of Saïs with a family of Ishmaelites.

Berlioz's music for this work has some very tender moments such as the well-known "Shepherd's Farewell" and the Mary and Joseph duet. The music for Herod's decision to kill the newborn children is chilling and dramatic. The whole work maintains interest throughout with its many challenges for soloists and choir members.

Conductor Rowan Harvey-Martin has done an excellent job bringing this large work together. Tenor Michael Martin sang the role of the Narrator with great feeling, especially at the start of the third section. As Herod, Andrew Fysh's fine bass voice was heard to great effect in the frenzied sequence where he orders the death of the babies.

Rebecca Collins gave an impassioned performance as Mary, singing and acting the role with clarity and warmth. The duet in the stable in Bethlehem with Rohan Thatcher, in excellent voice as Joseph, was especially notable. Michael Wilson sang the roles of Polydorus and the Father with strength and dignity. The shepherd's farewell to the Holy Family was memorably performed by the large Llewellyn Choir and the finale of the work was sung with great sensitivity.

Terese Rabe and Rebecca Timony gave a fine performance of the flute duet and the Llewellyn Sinfonia played the musical accompaniment very well.

The concert finished with three Christmas carols. The audience was invited to join the choir in singing the last carol, "Silent Night", and the sound of all our voices filling the Wesley Uniting Church was quite moving.