

As a relative newcomer to choral singing I learned a thing or two from listening to Exmouth Choral Society's performance of Bach's B Minor Mass at Holy Trinity Church on Saturday (Jan 24).

Now I understand the importance of watching your conductor. My own choir's MD frequently expresses his frustration at the number of faces he sees concentrating on the score rather than watching him and following his promptings.

Instead of having confidence in what they had learned in weeks of rehearsals, many of the Exmouth choir kept their faces fastidiously fixed on their folders. In consequence there were some missed entries, lessening the impact of the piece from time to time.

It also seemed that, in much of the first half particularly, the dynamics the conductor's hands clearly demanded were not often achieved in choral terms. A marked contrast with the instant response he received from the orchestra. A shame since he poured so much energy into the performance, all but dancing elegantly on his podium, clearly moved by his own perception of Bach's creation.

The performance was graced by Exeter Symphony Orchestra and eight outstandingly talented and hugely experienced singers, including local sopranos Elizabeth Drury[Topsham] and Alison Burnett[Lympstone}.

Two of the highlights of the evening for me were the octet's 'Qui tollis peccata mundi', and the beautiful instrumental accompaniment of the bass solo 'Quoniam tu solus sanctus,' especially by the flugel horn.

From that point on, the whole performance seemed to be more polished. The energetic 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' brought the first half to an end, and the choir began the second with an unexpected, beautifully crisp opening to the 'Credo'. There was a tangible tingling sensation to the 'Sanctus' and an infectious passion to the 'Dona nobis pacem' (grant us peace).

Just the night before one choir member was heard to utter a moan about 'the ruddy concert' looming, and immediately it ended I heard another despairing over the number of missed entries – but they can be proud of their performance and the pleasure it gave to so many.

Hundreds of people thronged the church to hear them, the soloists and the instrumentalists. Their's was a huge achievement with many inspired moments and some outstanding singing and obligato playing. Some amongst the audience were deeply moved.

The evening of glorious music was dedicated by Mr Northcott to victims of violence in trouble spots around the world and ended with a passionate plea for peace which must have lifted the spirit of each and every one of us. Thank you all.