

**The Exmouth Choral Society's Spring Concert at Holy Trinity Church last Saturday (25th April) featured a performance of Franz Joseph Haydn's St. Cecilia Mass, preceded by the Suite No. 1 in C by Johann Sebastian Bach.**

Members of the Exeter Symphony Orchestra, leader Gillian Crew, and conducted by Brian Northcott, gave a good account of the Bach Suite which opened the concert. The ensemble comprised two violins, viola, 'cello, double bass, with two oboes and two bassoons, (the wind instruments being particularly prominent) and the work formed a fitting prelude to the masterpiece which was to follow the interval.

Haydn wrote the St. Cecilia Mass in 1766 shortly after he became Kapellmeister to Prince Nicolaus Esterhazy at Eisenstadt Castle in Lower Austria (east of Vienna). The work is known as a 'cantata' Mass, meaning that it was organised like a cantata with many individual movements and on a very large scale lasting well over an hour. It was appropriate that conductor Brian Northcott in the ideal setting of Holy Trinity Church should choose this work to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Haydn's death in 1809.

Brian's policy of giving young artists a chance to perform as soloists with the Society, presented us with the soprano Bethany Partridge and contralto Harriet Gibson, aged 16 and 17, both of whom live in Devon. They were joined by the tenor Michael Gormley, also making his debut with the Society, and the bass Micheal Vian Clarke who has performed with the choir on previous occasions

To perform as a soloist in front of a live audience of about 200 must be a daunting experience, especially for such young artists, but they all distinguished themselves with memorable performances throughout. Having heard Michael Vian Clarke on a previous occasion, his performance was predictably well delivered, with some fine solo passages. Harriet Gibson, showing a warm developing Contralto voice, and Michael Gormley, tenor, both gained in confidence as the work proceeded, with both artists demonstrating the potential to become fine performers in their future careers. Being familiar with the St Cecilia Mass, I was eagerly awaiting what I consider to be one of my memorable highlights, the sixth section of the Gloria, 'Quoniam', a dazzlingly bright aria for solo soprano. Bethany Partridge gave a wonderful account of this, ably supported by the orchestra. Confident and assured - just delightful, as she was also in the preceding 'Laudamus te'.

The choir had a prominent role throughout the Mass, with several lengthy sections without the soloists. Their singing was enthusiastic and enjoyable, though I thought at times, with only six tenors and eight basses, that perhaps a little more volume would have been welcome, especially for those members of the audience at the back of the church, although dynamics were well explored especially quiet ones.

The orchestra for the Mass had been augmented with the addition of two trumpets and timpani, greatly adding to the richness of the orchestral sound and the small ensemble produced a rich and polished performance.

Judging from the comments I heard at the end of the concert, the evening was an enjoyable experience for all concerned, and who all will be no doubt returning on 23rd January, 2010 for the next anniversary performance by the Society, the Monteverdi Vespers of 1610, celebrating 400 years since the creation of this composer's greatest work.