

BEDFORD CHORAL SOCIETY - CONCERT MARCH 20th 2010

Bruckner - Motets
Rossini - Stabat Mater
Schubert - Symphony No. 8 ('Unfinished')

Soloists

Tenor and Soprano - Bonaventura and Rebecca Bottone
Mezzo-soprano - Juliette Pochin
Bass - James Gower.

Conductor: Michael Rose

Bedfordshire Symphony Orchestra

Saturday evening's concert was an interesting experience; I recall a meeting of the programme planning sub-committee way back, at which Michael said he was happy to conduct more or less anything, as long as it was not Rossini's Petite Messe Solennelle.

We had done this piece in 1969, and I certainly found it decidedly underwhelming. We last sang the Stabat Mater in 1980; I missed that one, so I was interested as to what impression I would have; one would certainly expect a mix of the sacred and operatic styles, and so it turned out. The words are highly emotive - a grieving mother, with Christendom as the onlookers, hoping for their own salvation, and sharing the grief. The four soloists had some real show pieces, even if now and again the music became, frankly, a bit trite. I had a score to look at and I enjoyed what I heard. I counted 23 basses and 14 tenors. Tenors come over better as a rule, but there were one or two slightly over-enthusiastic bass entries - a minor comment. What a marvellous fugue at the end! Fugue is the last musical form one would associate with Rossini, but he could deliver one when he wished to, with an impressive, more homophonic coda to round it off.

The first of the three Bruckner Motets, *Locus iste*, which opened the concert, put the chorus on the spot straightaway: unaccompanied, there are problems of ensemble, pitch, attack and release; I guess there may have been a few moments of stress in rehearsal. On the day we were very happy, even if I thought I detected Michael's raised index finger inviting a shade sharper somewhere! The final motet, *Christus factus est*, had the added challenge of chromaticism; it sounded fine to me.

Listening to, and watching, the Schubert, I found myself wondering just how many symphonies, concertos, overtures etc. Michael has, stored away in his musical memory. Another reminder of the ability of this remarkable musician who has done so much for music in Bedford and elsewhere.

Ken Laflin

March 2010