

CHORAL SOCIETY MAGIC

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WHY on earth was the Canterbury Festival having a concert in Dover? Cultural colonialism in anticipation of the (possible) new local government Unitary Authority? Who on earth devised that uniquely fantastic programme mixture of Mascagni, Saint-Saëns and Beethoven? Was it a crackpot or a genius? How could the Choral Society afford to employ Ronald Smith, world-famous and world class pianist? Had they a philanthropic millionaire up their sleeves? Why did the Town Hall organ sound like a real one? Had Dover District Council spent a discrete quarter million on restoration? What connection was there between the Connaught Orchestra and the Connaught Hall? More District Council sorcery?

The happy answer to all these questions is: Michael Foad, the Choral Society's conductor, whose premature retirement from Westmount made his many talents, musical and organisational, even more available to Dover (and district).

In another article in this *Newsletter*, Michael (a Founder Member of the Dover Society Committee!) solves the mystery of the organ, in which the Society was (dare I say: "Of course!") helpfully involved. In addition, it was Michael's long personal friendship with the pianist, who fortunately happens to live in Saltwood, which moved Ronald Smith himself to suggest that the Saint-Saëns 4th Concerto and the Beethoven Choral Fantasia, which he had "under his fingers" for a forthcoming concert in Worthing, could also be given in Dover. The Canterbury Festival Director, Mark Deller, was delighted to offer some financial support and all(!) that Michael had to do was to persuade his choristers to add a third to their two annual concerts and to add two more (relatively short) works to their repertoire.

The Mascagni Easter Hymn, almost as well known as the Intermezzo, from "Cavalleria Rusticana" was a sensible, indeed inspired, popular choice. Nothing like getting a concert off to a good moving and rousing start and with Elizabeth Weaver as soloist, John Hurd as organist, the Connaught Orchestra and all ninety-plus(!) joyously enthusiastic choristers, it was not only a good beginning. It was fittingly repeated as prelude to the second half of the programme.

I will risk saying (since no review is complete without a grouch) that with all Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Rachmaninov and Prokofiev, etc, etc, not to mention Grieg and Tchaikovsky, concerti within his grasp, I was a little surprised, not to say disappointed, with the choice of Saint-Saëns' 4th. I must, however, happily

confess that with the mélange of good tunes, vigorous rhythms, and virtuoso piano and orchestral scoring, I was more than half persuaded. When I learn, as Michael tells me, that it was performed after just *one* Sunday afternoon rehearsal with the Connaught Orchestra, a combination of local professionals (naturally including Royal Marines from Deal, hint hint, nudge nudge) with some local amateurs of professional standard, I am suitably rebuked.

As Michael says in his (predictably) excellent programme notes, Beethoven's Choral Fantasia, is a fascinating work. It begins with a virtuoso piano solo, broadens into a piano concerto, and climaxes with a choral finale which is obviously a trial run for the "Ode to Joy" of the last movement of the 9th Symphony. So brilliantly was it performed that Ronald Smith, who is obviously a very relaxed friendly man as well as a virtuoso, suggested that the choral part of the last movement be repeated. The whole of the concert was an Ode to Joy and Dover's debt to the Dover Choral Society and its conductor is immeasurable.

Dovorians will do themselves, as well as the Choral Society, a favour to pack the house whenever they perform and to enrol as Friends. It must cost a couple of thousand at least to put on concerts of this quality and Dover's touristic image cannot have too many of them.

THE JOY – AND THE COST – OF MUSIC!

APOLOGIES for yet more words from me, but further to Jack Woolford's kind report on the Choral Society's concert last October with Ronald Smith, I thought it might be appropriate to give few facts about the financial problems of putting on such a concert, for each time we give a concert it costs us, as a Society, some £1,500 to £2,000!

To take, for example, our performance in March 1994 of the Brahms and Fauré Requiems, the expenses were £3,294, and the income from Box Office and programmes £1,648. The expenses included the hire of the Town Hall, £192 (dare one say a comparatively modest and fair charge compared to the cost of many other halls in East Kent, and what a lovely concert hall it is). Soloists £730, and the Orchestra £2,020. Why does the orchestra cost so much?, I hear you ask. Unfortunately all these concerts have to be given – like so many professional concerts – on just one three hour rehearsal with the orchestra and soloists, and to play music of the difficulty of the Brahms Requiem one rehearsal demands players of the highest quality. The fee recommended by the National Federation of Music Societies is – near enough – £50 per player (a harp costs double that!) and players from outside the immediate area, e.g. London, should also receive travelling expenses, so with an orchestra of forty-six players at £50 per head . . . I'll leave you to do your own mathematics!