

Every voice counts

Newbury Chamber Choir and Orchestra, at St Mary's Church, Thatcham, on Saturday, April 9

NEWBURY Chamber Choir's concert on Saturday evening was a departure from the usual repertoire of baroque and classical music accompanied by chamber orchestra.

We heard three 19th-century pieces accompanied by organ, works that are often performed by choral societies with large numbers of singers. Here every voice counted and this enhanced our appreciation of the performances.

The concert began with an interesting piece by Liszt called *Via Crucis*, which is a meditation on the *Fourteen Stations of the Cross*. The choir, whose musical director is Edward Lambert, moved around the church for different sections of the piece. The choreography was well handled and added to the success of the piece.

The short movements, changing textures and the organ interludes all added to a captivating performance, which was poignant, especially in this season of Lent.

The soloists were John Lang (tenor) and Stephen Holmes (bass_ who are both members of the choir and their contributions were very effective. This was a powerful and meaningful performance, which held our attention as the drama was enacted within the music, underpinned by a significant organ part.

After the interval, we heard one sacred chorus by Brahms, *O bone Jesu*, for ladies voices only.

The main piece in the second half was the original 1887 version of the *Mass in D major, Op 86* by Dvorak, which was written specifically for chamber choir and organ. The solo parts were sung very successfully by the choir; this can be a challenge, as soloists often have to sing more complicated parts than the chorus and it can be difficult to achieve unity. This was not the case here, and it was very refreshing to hear individual voice parts singled out. The choir shaped the sensitive moments, brought out the lyricism and emphasised the rhythmic phrases.

The organ was superbly played by Mark Browne, the resident organist of Bradfield College; it is no mean feat to play a difficult and challenging accompaniment and watch the conductor. The guest conductor for the evening, Paul Robinson, held the attention of all the singers and directed a very enjoyable concert.

ROSEMARY EVANS