

Inspired by life, death and poetry

Newbury Chamber Choir and Orchestra, at St John's Church, Newbury on Saturday, November 13

There was much anticipation about the world premiere of Edward Lambert's *Rossetti Requiem* performed by Newbury Chamber Choir and Orchestra, on Saturday, conducted by the composer. This piece, which was composed for performance close to Remembrance Sunday, is a very unusual requiem in that it is based on a cycle of 10 poems by Christina Rossetti, influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This is not a religious work, rather a humanist response to life's spiritual and emotional journey and attitude to death.

This was difficult music for all the performers, including the professional musicians in the orchestra and the soloists, Jacqueline Pischorn (soprano), Grace Wain (mezzo-soprano), Paul Robinson (tenor) and Ian Caddy (bass). The orchestration included the use of deep concert toms, vibraphone and tambourine, superbly played by Joe Richards.

The performers were all outstanding and it was clear that much preparation had been involved. Lambert gave clear direction and brought everything together in an inspirational performance. This was a brave composition with some hints of Britten and Vaughan Williams. There was much anguish in the music. However, long passages of disturbing expressionistic sounds were relieved by calmer and warmer sections. There was clever use of programmatic ideas and irregular rhythms.

Inevitably, there was avid discussion about the piece during the interval and the Mozart in the second half of the programme was like soothing balm. The *Clarinet Concerto in A major, K622*, with Elizabeth Drew as soloist and director sounded lovely in the church acoustic. The music uses the full range of the instrument; it was composed originally for bass clarinet, which has an extended bass range. Drew's performance was masterful and her dialogue with the orchestra was perfect.

The final work in the programme was *Litaniae Lauretanae, K109*, directed from the chamber organ by Lambert. This short *Litany of Loreto* for choir, soloists and orchestra, in praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was an effective choice to bring the concert to a peaceful conclusion.

Rosemary Evans

Newbury Weekly News, Thursday, 18 November 2010