

## **Cockermouth Harmonics Society – A German Requiem**

**Christ Church Cockermouth,**

**January 27<sup>th</sup> 2018.**

The concert featured three sets of nineteenth century religious choral music written by Austrian and German composers - Rheinberger, Bruckner and Brahms.

This was Ian Wright's first concert as Musical Director of the Cockermouth Harmonic Society Choir now in their 150th season. This was a good start under new management.

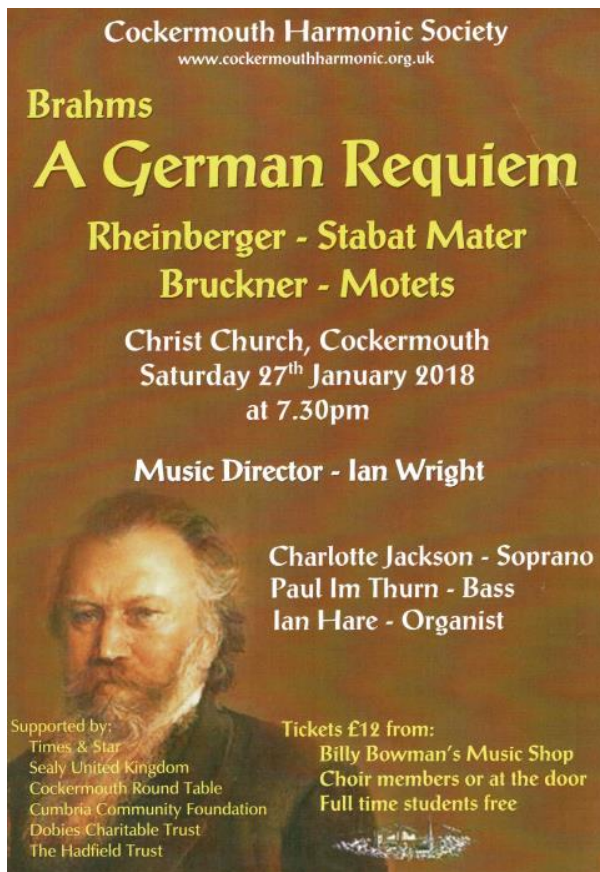
Accompaniment was on the church organ, played by Ian Hare. The organ console is situated at gallery level at the back of the church, creating difficulties of communication with the conductor. All the organist can see via a rear-view mirror is the conductor's back and baton. Both Ians coped with this admirably.

The Choir began with Rheinberger's Stabat Mater, a setting of a hymn to Mary, mother of Jesus, standing at the foot of the cross. The Tenors introduced the words 'Stabat mater dolorosa', from which the genre gets its name. Eight stanzas in, following the death of the crucified, there is a pause and then the tenors begin the second part with the words, 'Eja, mater fons amoris' followed by the sopranos. The final stanza features a round with each part of the choir picking up their lines beautifully with the final hope of safety in Paradise led by the sopranos. This is a complicated piece well executed with just the occasional uncertainty.

Anton Bruckner wrote about 40 motets; in this programme we heard four. 'Pange Lingua' - in celebration of the Passion of Christ - was the earliest Bruckner wrote at age 11; he reworked it in later life. 'Locus iste' is intended to be sung at the dedication of a new church; 'Ave Maria' asks for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin; 'Liberate me' in some Christian traditions is sung over the deceased as an absolution before burial. This was the only one accompanied by the organ. The choir brought out Bruckner's delightful harmonies and musical dynamics, very quiet in parts and very loud in, for example, the proclamation of the name 'Jesu' in the Ave Maria.

And so to Brahms' 'A German Requiem' the main work on the programme. The words are drawn by Brahms himself from Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German, published complete in 1534. The Requiem is a sacred piece but not intended to be used with church liturgy. It begins very quietly with an introduction on the organ and builds across the choir, 'Selig sind, die da Leid tragen'. The harmonies made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. There is great beauty in this music. Here too the choir had been working on musical dynamics to great effect. There are seven sections with soloists featured in three of them. Paul Im Thurn (Bass) has diction so clear that German speakers would have had no difficulty in directly understanding as he sang 'Herr, lehre doch mich' and parts of 'Denn wir haben hie keine bleibende Statt'. An energetic chorus accompanied. I loved the lightness of touch as the choir gave us in 'Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen'. With the choir supporting but seated this time, Charlotte Jackson (Soprano) sang with great control and feeling 'Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit'. It fell to the choir with final chords on the organ to bring the work to a close in the seventh movement. The whole experience was wonderful. At around 70 minutes, this is Brahms' longest work. It is a credit to all concerned that our attention was rapt throughout.

Martyn Evans



Cockermouth Harmonic Society  
www.cockermouthharmonic.org.uk

**Brahms**  
**A German Requiem**

**Rheinberger - Stabat Mater**  
**Bruckner - Motets**

Christ Church, Cockermouth  
Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2018  
at 7.30pm

Music Director - Ian Wright

Charlotte Jackson - Soprano  
Paul Im Thurn - Bass  
Ian Hare - Organist

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