



CELEBRATING PEACE, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Celebrating Peace was the title of Cumbria Rural Choirs 2018 concert, which took place in St. Andrew's Church in Penrith. In this commemoration of the end of the First World War a century ago the main works were Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* (1936) and Karl Jenkins' *Requiem* (2005). These two very different works share a common theme of acknowledging the suffering that war involves: Vaughan Williams also acknowledges heroism and the satisfaction of victory. Both are encased in traditional Latin text – the soprano soloist pleading for peace at the beginning and end of the Vaughan Williams work and the Karl Jenkins piece using some of the traditional movements of the Requiem Mass. Both incorporate poems which emphasise the dangers and suffering of war: the baritone soloist in the Vaughan Williams work uses the powerful words of the American poet, Walt Whitman, and the Requiem interjects Japanese death poems into the tapestry of traditional words.

Vaughan Williams grew increasingly conscious of the growing threat in Europe during the 1930s and the opening of *Dona Nobis Pacem* offers immediate evidence of this as the soprano soloist's gentle plea for peace becomes a full-throated demand from the chorus. The demanding textures and contrasts of *Beat, beat! Drums* were conveyed



well in a movement of power and urgency, and the choir was equally at home in the spacious, undulating harmonies of Walt Whitman's *Dirge for Two Veterans*. Paul im Thurn was an excellent baritone soloist in the other Whitman poems, singing with authority and clear diction, and the choir made the most of Vaughan Williams' skilful choral writing in the powerful build-up in the final movement. As the soprano soloist made a last gentle plea for

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*Celebrating Peace*  
to commemorate the end of the first World War  
Saturday 17th March 2018  
St. Andrews Church, Penrith, at 7.30.p.m.  
Karl Jenkins  
*Requiem*  
Ralph Vaughan Williams  
*Dona Nobis Pacem*

British Sinfonietta

making music

also featuring  
North Lakes School Choir

with  
Charlotte Jackson (soprano)  
Paul im Thurn (bass)  
and  
British Sinfonietta  
Conductor  
Ian Wright

The Vaughan Williams  
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peace, there was the realisation that this was a well-prepared and sensitive performance of a challenging and rarely-heard piece (last sung by Cumbria Rural Choirs almost forty years ago).

The choir of North Lakes School (Penrith) has appeared often on the public stage and their confident singing of Sharon Durant's song *In Flanders Field*, under the direction of Martyn Soulsby, gave them a memorable opportunity to sing with a professional orchestra. Other younger singers from the recently-formed CRC Young Voices featured in David Fanshawe's *Dona Nobis Pacem* from his *African Sanctus* (1994). Charlotte Jackson, who has done much valuable work in training young voices in Cumbria, was a sensitive soloist in this short and moving work.

The choice of Karl Jenkins' *Requiem* for the final item of this commemorative concert was a courageous one. For much of the work Jenkins employs traditional choral textures – the beautifully-sung *Introit* with its haunting horn motif is a good example. The unaccompanied opening section of the *Confutatis*, the *Lachrymosa* and the lovely top notes and phrasing from sopranos in the final *In Paradisum* were also real highlights. A little less assurance was shown in the *Dies Irae*, where the choral writing is less sympathetic and the choir had to compete with the percussive, incessant rhythms of a powerful orchestral texture. Japanese drums and the ancient Japanese wind instrument, the *shakuhachi*, brought a feeling of authenticity to the five haiku death songs, *Now as a Spirit* being particularly mesmeric both in its writing for ladies voices and instrumental effects. Equally effective was the combination of haiku poems (sung by ladies) with the traditional words of the *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei* (sung by men). Despite some moments of uncertainty in the haiku poems, this was a successful performance of such a varied work and was a great credit to the choir and those involved in preparing them.

The excellent playing of the British Sinfonietta, a young professional orchestra well-versed in accompanying choral concerts, was a major feature of the evening. The percussion section was particularly outstanding in the *Requiem*. Two experienced local singers, Charlotte Jackson and Paul im Thurn, were reliable as ever in their role as soloists and Ian Pattinson (Lancaster Priory) was organist in the first half of the programme. Despite chilling temperatures outside and the increasing threat of snow, there was a large audience, and Ian Wright, chorus-master of Cumbria Rural Choirs and conductor for this special concert, could feel well pleased at the way in which choir, soloists and orchestra worked together to produce a concert of such quality.

Colin Marston