

# Cockermouth Harmonic Society Review - 'For the New World'.

Cockermouth Harmonics Choir and the West Lakeland Orchestra combined to give their audience an imaginative programme of music at their Summer Concert. The various pieces were linked together by references to the 'New World' of the Americas.

We started and ended the evening with 'Hiawatha's Wedding Feast', part of Longfellow's poem set to music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. First up was the overture, well played by the orchestra with Ian Wright conducting. This is a demanding piece for woodwind and brass, with exciting playing from the French Horns. Listening to this, you could see why this black British-born composer was so highly thought of by his peers, including Sir Arthur Sullivan who regarded him as a genius. It was good to be able to hear live performances of his music.

Five Spirituals from Tippett's 'A Child of Our Time' followed, the choir and soloists but without the orchestra. Fiona Weakley's (soprano) and Christopher Steele's (tenor) performances were ones to make the hairs on one's neck stand on end. There were excellent dynamic contrasts from the choir in 'Nobody knows'. Fiona and Jolyon Dodgson (Bass) came together effectively for 'Go Down, Moses' with Fiona the soloist in 'By and By'. The three soloists were joined from the choir by Jenny Weakley, Fiona's daughter, to make up a quartet for the final spiritual 'Deep River'.

Dvorak is probably best known for his "New World" Symphony but this concert featured another American commission, his 'Te Deum' a setting of the Christian Hymn, 'Te Deum Laudamus' meaning 'Thee O God we praise'. The work proceeded from one section to another without a break. After a vivid opening from choir and orchestra, Fiona Weakley was in fine voice as she sang 'Sanctus'. Jolyon Dodgson took a convincing lead in 'Tu Rex Gloria'. The choir and orchestra gave us 'Aeterna fac'. Both bass and soprano led into 'Dignare, Domine', before the whole company came together in a fantastic finale, full of soaring voices, strings, wind instruments, timpani and percussion - in short, tutti.

The entire second half was devoted to 'Hiawatha's Wedding Feast' completed in 1898. It is the first part of a trilogy of cantatas entitled 'Scenes from The Song of Hiawatha by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow'. It made Coleridge-Taylor's name known throughout the world. For some reason 'Hiawatha' brings back memories of school choir performances. I know that my secondary school was engaged in a performance at the Welsh National Eisteddfod in 1964 but more than this I cannot say. The work consisted of nine sections, eight for chorus and orchestra and one for solo tenor and orchestra. The choir were seated behind the orchestra and into the chancel of the church, where the sound tends to go up rather than forward. Balance was always going to be a challenge and the choir sometimes could not be heard as well as they would have liked though it was obvious they were singing their hearts out. After the muscular dancing of Pau-Puk-Keewis, came the beautifully sung, almost all unaccompanied, request to Chiababos, the 'sweetest of all singers and the best of all musicians', to sing to the assembled guests. After that daunting introduction, Christopher Steele's singing of 'Onaway! Awake, beloved!' was a delight, as always. Finally, Iago, the storyteller with 'immeasurable falsehoods' is invited to tell the guests 'a tale of wonder'. Musically, the central motif is passed round the orchestra once more and a thunderous crescendo brings the piece to a thrilling end. Wonderful.

Martyn Evans  
July 2019.



Cockermouth Harmonic Society  
**SUMMER CONCERT**  
**"FOR THE NEW WORLD"**  
**HIAWATHA'S WEDDING FEAST**  
- Samuel Coleridge-Taylor  
**TE DEUM** - Antonin Dvořák  
**FIVE SPIRITUALS** - Michael Tippett  
from "A Child of Our Time"  
**SATURDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2019**  
Christ Church, Cockermouth  
at 7.30pm  
Music Director - Ian Wright  
Fiona Weakley - Soprano  
Christopher Steele - Tenor  
Jolyon Dodgson - Bass  
West Lakeland Orchestra  
Tickets £16 from:  
Billy Bowman's Music Shop,  
choir members or at the door.  
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