

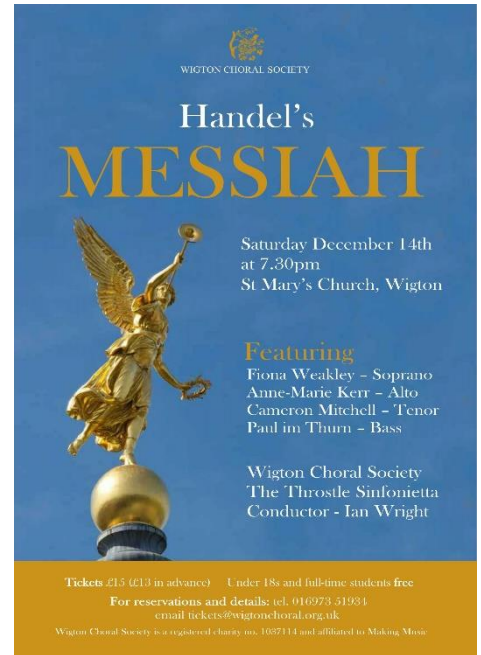
Wigton Choral Society

Handel's Messiah – Saturday 14th December 2019

It's hard to believe that Handel's Messiah only received a luke-warm reception at its world première in Dublin on the 13th April 1742. This certainly wasn't the case in St Mary's Church, Wigton on Saturday 14th December. Under the intelligent and sensitive direction of Choral Director Ian Wright, Wigton Choral Society's performance featured four outstanding Cumbrian vocalists – Fiona Weakley (Soprano), Anne-Marie Kerr (Alto), Cameron Mitchell (Tenor) and Paul im Thurn (Bass), alongside the Throstle Sinfonia and Ian Hare on the organ.

The work is a challenging one for any performer, and the choir certainly did it justice. They were confident with all of the complex melodic phrases that make up the choruses. They glided through the rapid melodic lines with gusto and accuracy, and it was a delight to hear all four sections of the choir meandering through the counterpoint so expressively. The choir were strategically placed with the tenors central and forwards between the sopranos and altos, with the basses behind, accentuating the vocal balance. All of the sections of the choir were remarkable within their own right – the basses resonant and rich, the tenors nimble and confidently taking the high phrases, the altos secure and articulate, and the sopranos impressively lyrical. There were moments of choral brilliance, such as "And the Glory of the Lord," and "For unto Us a Child Was Born." Then there was great contrast between the boldly sung "Glory to God" and the very expressively mournful "Surely He Hath Bourne our Griefs." The "Hallelujah" was a gem to behold, and the choir held their own beautifully in the brief poignant a cappella sections of "Since by Man Came Death."

The four soloists were well chosen for the work. Cameron Mitchell's *Airs and Recitatives* were beautifully sung. His opening section "Comfort Ye My People" set the standard for the rest of the evening, lyrical and effortless. Paul im Thurn's bass solos were fabulous contrast, with his depth and resonance. His "For Behold, Darkness Shall Cover the Earth" was one of the most poignant, beautifully sombre moments of the work. Alto Anne-Marie Kerr glided through her *Airs* with her warm and deep vocal tone, and fabulously delicate vocal ornamentation. Fiona Weakley's bright Soprano voice soared through the church, making unforgettable moments such as her wonderful rendition of "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth."



The orchestration was more in keeping with Handel's original concept for the piece with the instrumentation almost matching Handel's première exactly, which balanced the choir perfectly. The strings and oboes were delicate, and the organ, bassoon and cello continuo subtle and colourful. The trumpets and timpani brightly transformed the bigger choral sections. Alexandra Kenyon played a truly remarkable trumpet solo in "The Trumpet Shall Sound," accompanying Paul im Thurn's powerful bass lead.

Special congratulations are also due to Ian Wright who rehearsed, organised and conducted the work with sensitivity and remarkable musicianship. The evening was an impressive achievement for all involved.

Review by Alexander Clarke