

# THE BALTIC WAY

A concert by Wigton Choral Society, St Mary's Church, Wigton, Friday 16 June 2017

Eleven years ago, Ian Wright travelled out to Lithuania, where he met respected composer Kristina Vasiliauskaitė and sang some of her beautifully crafted choral compositions. Last week Kristina was given a warm welcome to Cumbria to hear the UK premiere of her *Magnificat*, this time with Ian directing the performance by Wigton Choral Society as part of their summer concert.

The programme was an adventurous and fascinating exploration of *The Baltic Way*, the concert title referring both to the wider Baltic region's 1000-year-old Christian heritage, and to its remarkable, peaceful, singing revolution in the late 1980s against Communist rule.

On show in Wigton last week was some of the religious music, new and old, which has flourished or re-emerged around the Baltic Sea since then. The choir's performance of Kristina's *Magnificat* was full of conviction and obvious enjoyment of her gift of writing for voices, with skilful and sympathetic accompaniment from Mark Hindley (organ), and delightful additions of colour from Gabrielle Sanders (oboe), William Nixon (flute) and Ian Sharman (trumpet).

The singers responded well to their director, whether conveying the warm Marian devotion of *Totus tuus* by Górecki, or expressing desolation in Pärt's austere *Salve Regina*. They stood in the apse and choir stalls, where their voices could blend before travelling out to the audience. This worked especially well in the many unaccompanied items, which the choir delivered with confidence, overcoming the lack of support from the dry acoustic, and producing a strong, balanced sound, despite the very low numbers of tenors.

Among the shorter pieces, Kristina's gentle *Jeremiah Song* featured her signature descending bass line, and a lovely solo moment from Felicity Blamires. Also notable were a beautiful *Alleluia* by Sixten, a rather hypnotic *Ave Maria* by Dubra, and two instrumental interludes: first Mark played a bright and colourful organ tone piece by Gade, and later Ian took up his violin to perform Pärt's tranquil and haunting *Spiegel im Spiegel*, accompanied sensitively by the choir's rehearsal pianist Amanda Wright. The whole concert concluded appropriately with the beloved hymn *Be Still, my Soul* by Sibelius.

Many congratulations and thanks to Wigton Choral Society and director Ian Wright for having the courage to leave the well-trodden path of choral society repertoire, and educating us, as well as entertaining us, with an evening of truly beautiful music.

Anne-Marie Kerr

