

**Review of St Matthew Passion by J. S. Bach  
Dunblane Cathedral, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011  
Rosenethe Singers, conducted by Matthew Beetschen**

Bach's great choral work "The St Matthew Passion" has an almost operatic sense of drama, from the flowing opening chorus with its questions and answers, through the interactions of the characters, to the final bitter-sweet lullaby.

On Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> March in a packed Dunblane Cathedral, the Rosenethe Singers, the Scottish Bach Consort with Andrew Dickinson (Evangelist), Ronald Nairne (Christus), Rachel Redmond (soprano), Laura Kelly (alto), Ben Alden (tenor), and Ross McInroy (bass), and conductor Matthew Beetschen, took us through the story of Christ's betrayal and crucifixion.

The Rosenethe was once again joined by members of the Berlin Konzertchor and also, in the opening chorus, by the young choristers of Dunblane Cathedral and St Saviours Church. This was taken at good speed, avoiding any feeling of sentimentality, and the layers of narrative and questions flowed naturally, enhanced by the sweet singing of the young choristers.

Andrew Dickinson as the Evangelist was in complete control of his narration throughout, using the words to convey every nuance of meaning and understanding of the text, and his performance was one of the highlights of the evening. Ronald Nairne has a lovely bass voice with a very good upper register and brought gravity to his role of Christus.

The soprano Rachel Redmond sings with a lovely easy production and flexibility, showing a strong sense of the meaning of the text. Laura Kelly, alto, was secure in her solos and coped well with the long vocal lines, only requiring now to add power to her lower register. Ben Alder was an excellent tenor soloist who had no difficulty with his demanding arias whilst bass Ross McInroy showed musicianship and conviction, especially in his solo with cello accompaniment.

The choir sang throughout with confidence, sounding fresh right to the end of the work, and with excellent balance between the parts. There was plenty of dramatic declamation contrasting with the reflective quality of the chorales and it was good to see so many of the choir not glued to their scores and able to focus on the conductor. The Scottish Bach Consort, led by Angus Ramsay, contributed enormously to the performance, underpinning the choruses and providing sympathetic continuo accompaniments in the recitatives and solos.

Matthew Beetschen conducted as always with musicianship and conviction, setting tempi and controlling dynamics so that the whole of this great oratorio unfolded naturally, and he deserves our gratitude for his energy and enthusiasm.

**Sasha Alexander 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011**