

THE WAR REQUIEM

Any performance of Benjamin Britten's personal statement of his anti war convictions as laid out in his great "War Requiem" is bound to be an emotional event, but the performance by the Rosenethe Singers under their conductor, Matthew Beetschen, in collaboration with choristers from Berlin was especially poignant. The atmosphere in a packed Dunblane Cathedral on the 8th of November was electric even before the performance began, and the audience remained enthralled throughout, the silence after the final Amen showing the level of their involvement.

Britten intended this work to be an act of reconciliation, and the welcome participation of the Berliner Konzert Chor and the Embassy Singers from Berlin was much appreciated by the audience and would have delighted the composer. The Latin Mass for the dead is interspersed with poems by Wilfred Owen, and there are clear lines of demarcation in the work, with the poems sung by tenor and baritone, and the choir joined in the Latin Mass by the soprano. Then we have the disembodied voices of young singers floating in the distance accompanied by the organ, a chamber orchestra and a full orchestra making a work of great complexity rhythmically and melodically.

The choir achieved a beautiful soft tone in the opening Requiem Eternae and the Chamber Choir from Morrison's Academy made an impact with their beautiful tone and excellent diction, sounding angelic and other-worldly throughout the work.

In Andrew Dickinson we have a tenor of real quality, always sensitive to the text and able to project the words with clarity and musicality. This was particularly strong in the Lacrimosa where the soloists alternate with the choir, and in the final phrase of the Agnus Dei.

Soprano Natalie Montakhab has the strength and range so necessary for this work. She made a dramatic impact in the Rex Tremendae, and throughout the work she negotiated the leaps and runs effortlessly. As the soprano sings the Latin text, she does not have the obvious word-painting of the poems, but a more gentle approach in the Lacrimosa would have made more contrast with her exciting tremens in the Libera Me.

Douglas Nairne, baritone sings with a warm and round tone which at times could benefit from more projection, especially when required to cut through some quite thick orchestral writing, but he gave us some beautiful singing in his solo "after the blast". His final "none said the other" was sung with real atmosphere and led us beautifully into the final moments of the Requiem with choirs, soloists and orchestras finally combining in a wall of sound.

The Rosenethe Singers have demonstrated once again that they have the dedication and musicianship to tackle demanding and interesting work, In this performance they produced lovely warm tone in the “Recordare” and were well balanced and strong in the “Libera Me”. In the final moments of the piece they showed that they can sing very quietly, projecting consonants and vowels with intensity, a skill which they could have used to effect in other quiet moments. The choir produced some thrilling moments in the climaxes and coped well with the complex rhythms and harmonies aided by the lovely acoustic of the Cathedral.

The Scottish Bach Players, led by Angus Ramsay played with great conviction, painting scenes of battle and death with exciting work from the Brass and Percussion, then Harp and Woodwind providing peace and reconciliation. They never overpowered the choir but matched them in the drama.

All these forces were under the baton of Matthew Beetschen, conductor of the Rosenethe Singers and a musician with the intellect and vision to mount a performance of the War Requiem in Dunblane Cathedral on Remembrance Sunday. In this work he was dealing with large and diverse forces, and he managed them all with great skill and sensitivity, even rescuing the choir and orchestra from a moment of uncertainty.

It was a privilege to be present at a live performance of this great work, and for this we are grateful to all who took part.