

Greeting seasons

SEASONS and saintly music were celebrated by the **Hardynge Choir** at their autumn concert on Saturday in **High Street Methodist Church**.

Supported by soloists and orchestra, they presented a thoroughly enjoyable programme, cleverly devised to amalgamate a premiere, feast day, an honour and a dedication.

The performance began with **Howells' A Hymn for St Cecilia**, the poem by Ursula Vaughan Williams praising the patron saint of music, which captured the mood of the changing seasons in the form of a journey from morning to night and birth to death. Sung with excited anticipation, a clear start was made and benefited from a strong soprano line supported by organist **Richard Hills**.

Vivaldi's Concerto Autumn depicted the season in sound, and the **Paeon Consort** was performed with precision and clarity, with **Alberto Vidal**, violin, excelling as soloist.

Sasha Johnson Manning composed *The Hardynge Seasons* for the choir. Premiered in her presence, she has also become the choir's first Honorary President. She sets five seasonal poems beautifully. The Seasons describes the circling year very briefly. The Voice of Spring had more substance, and clear diction and attentive eye contact with the conductor was

admirable. Summer had a jaunty rhythm with nice piano interjections. **Matthew Woodward**, piano, accompanied the work with skill and care. To Autumn could have had a wider dynamic range. Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind had effective wallowing sequences, ending with a jolly "Heigh-ho!"

Handel's Ode for St Cecilia's Day provided a meatier second half. The lengthy overture had crisp double dotting from the oboes, and hemiolas abounded. Arias, recitatives and choruses followed, complete with a fine march in the middle. **Rhys Bowden**, tenor, and **Katherine Boyce**, soprano, were in wonderful voice, confident and secure, and **From Harmony** gave the tenors a chance to shine. What Passion had the longest introduction I've ever heard, and **Michael Wigram** on cello accompanied exquisitely. *The Trumpets Loud Clangour* and *Sharp Violins Proclaim* were declamatory. *Orpheus Could Lead* was bold, brief and snappy, and *But Bright Cecilia* brought superbly clear top notes from Katherine. The finale *As From the Power* was triumphal and exuberant, concluding a concert where all the performers demonstrated commitment and attention to detail. **Rufus Frowde** conducted with aplomb.

NEIL BUICK