

## Botley Choral Society Christmas Concert

All Saints Church Botley 9<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Warm words of welcome and willing hands serving wine ensured that the pleasure of the evening began for the expectant concert-goers well before the musicians arrived on stage. The popularity of this annual event was well evidenced by your reviewer's discovery that parking would present a challenge to ingenuity and also to subsequent memory of his car's whereabouts.

The Society's Christmas Concert is a highlight in the season of Advent for those who are aficionados and a delightful surprise for those new to the occasion. As ever, from the very start of the performance, the choir and instrumentalists exuded their usual competence, confidence and composure. Alexander L'Estrange's *Wassail*, drew the audience in with its bold unaccompanied opening, leading the way for a range of traditional instruments to introduce their distinctive rhythmic background – a key motif in the work.

*Wassail* explores the folk heritage of many well-known and some less common Christmas songs, managing, through its blend of lively tunes and foot-tapping percussion, to capture something of what village communities might have experienced in their seasonal celebrations in years gone by. The experience was redolent of a more reflective era, perhaps one more attuned to some of the deeper meanings of the Christmas festivities.

There were many challenges for the choir, to blend together phrases that seemed full of rapid, almost manic, movement, as well as subtle and gentle codas. The choir rose to that challenge well, combining strong volume and attack across the whole of their tonal range.

After more welcome refreshment the second half of the evening brought the audience a reflective selection of anthems, showcasing the quality of the choir's ability to create a blended yet robust sound.

*Long ago*, composed by David Burgess, supplied each section of the choir with its chance to stand proud and show its strength. Towards the end of a long and challenging programme the *Christmas Medley* gave the choir a final test of alertness and accuracy, before the audience got its own chance to sing, a welcome and anticipated feature of these events.

Conductor David Burgess' characterful ability to engage everyone in a relaxed and happy way meant that everyone left at the end with good memories, which hopefully included vehicle location.

Reverend Canon David Isaac