

Review of a Last Night of the Proms Concert at All Saints Church, Botley on Saturday 7th October 2023.

We arrived at All Saints to find the inside of the church festooned with a large union jack across the nave and countless garlands of bunting, small flags on every shelf and placed in every flower arrangement (I even discovered some in the toilets later). In the pews everyone was supplied with a programme and a flag for participation in the second half of the concert.

The concert began with the orchestra, especially assembled for this concert, playing themes from the *Mikado* – a rousing start. Then it was the turn of Botley Choral Society with two offerings. Firstly, *Early One Morning*, featuring a guest Soprano soloist, Julie Brombley and then an unusual arrangement of *The Lord is My Shepherd* arranged by E Higginbottom and Will Todd. The piece featured a ‘jazzy’ section with a syncopated rhythm, but the overwhelming strength of this piece was in the beautiful harmonies, well executed by the choir. Kirsty Cook played the very pretty *Chanson de Matin* on solo violin. It was back to the orchestra for Jamaican Rumba – all credit to the percussion section, which really made this piece sway and had the audience tapping their feet. Julie Brombley and her husband Dennis then wooed us with a number, *Only You*, from the musical *Starlight Express*. The programme for the concert contained works from old and current composers. Karl Jenkins, best known for his choral works, *The Armed Man*, *Adiemus* and *Requiem*, also wrote the next piece, *Cantilena*. The lyrics are nonsense words, and the piece is all about the sound of the consonants and vowels within a beautiful, tuneful composition. This piece projected well in the acoustic of the church, and was a joy to listen to, concentrating on the sound rather than any message or story that lyrics might be telling. This was followed by more rousing music and percussion from the orchestra with the *Can Can*; the audience only just resisted dancing in the aisles. The first half of the concert ended with the choir performing David Willcox’s *Sing!* David Burgess, musical director of Botley Choral Society, seated himself at the organ. The concert was being held to raise funds for the repair of the church organ. The choir, minus their director, were very attentive to Katherine Jones, who ably conducted the choir through what was a challenging piece. Elements where the choir interjected ‘Sing Praise’ were sung accurately and effectively, and with an authoritative performance, the choir really did raise the roof!

After a short break, where the audience wandered outside on an unseasonably warm evening and partook of refreshment, we took our seats for another surprise. Around the church music stands had popped up and Upham Recorder Orchestra played, flashmob style, *Autumn Leaves*. There were no descant recorders here, all the instruments were of the lower range, including a very fine bass instrument. Back to the more traditional orchestra and we were whisked away to provincial France with *Farandole*, by Bizet. Musical Director David Burgess set the audience a challenge in the next choral item, to identify how many musicals featured in a medley of songs by Andrew Lloyd-Webber. For the remainder of the concert, the format emulated the traditional themes of a Last Night at the Proms concert. There was Themes from *The Planets* (Holst) by the orchestra. The choir sang a challenging eight-part arrangement of *Lux Aeterna*, Elgar, arranged by J Cameron. The melody from this piece is the famous theme from *Nimrod*. Audience participation followed with *Jersusalem* (Parry), *Rule Britannia*, where soloist Julie Brombley looked resplendent in a Union Jack themed dress, and finally *Pomp and Circumstance* (Elgar) aka *Land of Hope and Glory*. Much flag waving was done; much applause deserved.

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