

Reviewer's name: Donal Hurley

Title of show: Haydn Nelson Mass

Company/performer: Garleton Singers, Bach Ensemble of Edinburgh, Stephen Doughty (*conductor*), Rachel McLean (*soprano*), Katherine Aitken (*mezzo soprano*), Ross Scanlon (*tenor*), William Costello (*bass*).

Genre: Classical (choral/orchestral)

Venue/Date: St Mary's, Haddington; 12/03/23, 7:30 pm

Garleton Singers: Haydn Nelson Mass

St Mary's, Haddington on the night of 12th March was the venue for a second outing of the Garleton Singers' Spring programme, following a premiere the previous night in Edinburgh's Canongate Kirk. The headline work was Haydn's Nelson Mass, preceded before the interval by three shorter works; Bach's secular "Birthday" Cantata, 'Tönet, ihr Pauken! Erschallet, Trompeten!', Telemann's Concerto for 3 Trumpets and Strings and the 'Reconciliation' movement from Jonathan Willcocks' commemorative 'A Great and Glorious Victory'. The choir and the Bach Ensemble of Edinburgh were conducted by Stephen Doughty (who also introduced the pieces), while solo vocal lines were sung by Rachel McLean (*soprano*), Katherine Aitken (*mezzo soprano*), Ross Scanlon (*tenor*) and William Costello (*bass*). The organ part was played by Caroline Cradock.

St Mary's lofty nave has a marvellously live acoustic, generally rewarding to choral *Baroque* and *Rococo* works and, in particular, those featuring organ, trumpets and timpani, such as the Bach, Telemann and Haydn. It is also a well-lit space – this reviewer appreciated being able to read the excellent programme notes. So many modern venues give little consideration to this requirement of the concertgoer.

The celebratory tone of the evening was set perfectly by the opening instrumental fanfare of the Bach and a confident bright entry of the choral lines, familiar as they were later recycled in the 'Christmas Oratorio'. The work is rich in Bach's most expert contrapuntal writing, which received clear and balanced delivery, especially the *fugato* elements. The instrumental interludes were well-pointed and the dramatic pause before the final fanfare was beautifully judged. A great concert-opener.

The Telemann was the chance for the 3 trumpets to shine, and shine they did. The stately homophonic *Largo* introduction led to a brisk optimistic fugal *Allegro*, elegantly ornamented with comments from timpani and strings. The trumpets were silent in the *Adagio*, while a lovely melody on upper strings and organ sang over a walking bass line. All in again for the brief virtuosic celebratory *Rondo*, marked *Presto*. Good clean fun.

The title of the Willcocks movement is a reference to the storm that raged immediately after the Battle of Trafalgar, when the surviving erstwhile naval combatants came to each other's aid. It occupies the part of the *Agnus Dei* in the underlying structure of the work as a mass. It opens with delicate string polyphony suggestive of that of Vaughan Williams and features a tenor solo and a hymn, 'O Trinity of Love and Power', in the last two verses of which audience participation was encouraged. This was very moving.

Despite its completion even before the news of Nelson's earlier Nile victory reached the Esterhazy court, Haydn's D-minor *Missa in Angustiis* (Mass in Straited Circumstances – *angustus* means narrow) has ever since borne the Nelson eponym and is regarded as a great masterpiece. Any ensemble bringing it to performance must regard it as such and must task themselves with convincing an audience of the same. This the Garleton Singers, the Bach Ensemble of Edinburgh and the four soloists achieved magnificently under the direction of Stephen Doughty. There were too many magical moments to mention them all, but I would single out a few for special mention. The soprano-bass dialogue in the *Qui tollis* part of the *Gloria* was breathtakingly fine. The exultant D-major *Et resurrexit* at the end of the Credo, with exquisite soprano ornamentation, vigorous agile string playing and the full chorus singing dramatically with absolute conviction was quite

excellent. The Haydn hallmark *sturm und drang* scoring at the beginning of the *Benedictus* built some dramatic tension (in a manner entirely absent, I would suggest, from his largely forgettable operas) and opened the listeners ears to the liturgical message.

The singers and players can be justly proud of achieving a performance of the highest calibre.