

# Joyous, welcome return to live performance

## MUSIC

### Bearsden Choir, City Halls, Glasgow

Sarah Urwin Jones

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THE last two years have proved challenging for singers. So it was for the 130-strong Bearsden Choir, a fine and much-expanded amateur choir who have spent the Covid years coming together virtually in solitude, or masked-up and so socially distanced that only half the choir could fit in the rehearsal hall at one time.

Sunday's fine afternoon concert put paid to all that, their first live event back in Glasgow's City Halls since 2019, and fronted as ever by professional soloists, and a musical programme – Haydn and Mozart choral stalwarts – that showcased the qualities of this well-drilled choir under their driven Music Director Andrew Nunn.

Haydn's popularly titled "Nelson" Mass – the *Missa in Angustiis* (Mass in Troubled Times)



**Bearsden Choir is back on song, and in fine style**

– is a familiar work for the Bearsden, last performed in 2016 with local children and orchestral ranks from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Written in 1798 as Napoleon was rampaging through a somewhat terrified central Europe, its orchestration lacks wind instruments – recently dismissed from the court at which Haydn was employed – providing a neat historical echo in our own troubled times with excellent choir organist Christopher Nickol, who did sterling work standing in for the

remaining strings, brass and timpani of Haydn's orchestration in this organ transcription, his considerable work cut out from the start in trying to render the full stormy urgency of the opening Kyrie.

Nunn brought tight and engaged choral singing to Haydn's enthralling ensemble, the writing less exposed than the Mozart Vespers which preceded it in Sunday's concert, the Bearsden's rich sound particularly fine in the Sanctus and Benedictus. Soloist Monica McGhee found herself fully-exercised in the soprano

role, her joyous and consolatory soprano soaring above the choir. The well-matched soloists included Penelope Cousland's rich mezzo – if given only titbits in these two works – and Andrew McTaggart's warm bass in fine duet with tenor Jamie MacDougall.

Mozart's stylistically diverse "Solemn Vespers" – *Vespere Solenne di Confessore* – written during his Salzburg years, was a first for the Bearsden. Nunn drove the choir on through the challenging Dixit, but it was the *Laudate Domine* which stood out, McGhee spellbinding and the choir, hushed, evocative, pin-perfect on their entry, magically sustaining the atmosphere.

Indeed elsewhere, the Bearsden's sound, finely balanced throughout the sections, found its nuanced expression in the raptures of the slower movements. In all, a joyous and welcome return to live performance from a choir whose commitment to singing over the pandemic amply repaid its enthusiastic audience.