

Triumph of teamwork, timing and technology in choir's glorious performance

Music

Bearsden Choir Virtual Vivaldi Gloria

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THE danger of aerosol transmission of coronavirus was understood from the earliest days of the Covid-19 pandemic, but for the members of the nation's amateur choirs the loss of the opportunity to meet and sing was a consequence governments north and south of the Border have been cruelly slow to acknowledge.

Fortunately, new technology has made it possible for choirs to maintain contact even if live performances together for audiences were forbidden, and chorusmasters and singers have shown themselves hugely adaptable to the present

circumstances. Few, however, have attempted anything on the scale of this effort of Bearsden Choir and musical director Andrew Nunn.

This complete performance of Vivaldi's Gloria, composed more than three centuries ago and last sung by Bearsden Choir at its 2019 Christmas concert, was an elaborate jigsaw that has come together to make a remarkable sonic – and visual – picture. The sheer scale of the achievement is quite breathtaking, as a little arithmetic quickly makes clear.

Recording and filming their own contributions at home, 94 members of the choir submitted their voices to the choruses. They were guided by film of Nunn conducting and the voices of four young soloists – soprano Ellen Mawhinney, mezzo Penelope Cousland, tenor Matthew



Soprano Ellen Mawhinney

Picture:: Bearsden Choir/Youtube

McKinney and bass Andrew MacTaggart – with the women also supplying the voices for the solo movements.

Those contributions were recorded, and filmed, in March in Glasgow's elegant Trades House, with the eight-piece McOpera Ensemble, led by violinist Katie

Hull. The assembling and editing of all this by Andrew Forbes and Demus Productions involved somewhere in the region of 1200 different files, by my back-of-an-envelope calculation.

That the choir's sections sound like integrated units from the opening Gloria chorus is the first wonder, and that level of co-ordination speaks volumes for how well-trained this group of singers has been in recent years. Even in choruses where the timing is tricky in live performance, like the sixth movement's Domine Fili Unigente, the choir sings as one, and right through to the closing Cum Sancto Spiritu, with its muscular opening by the basses, the smaller tenor section makes its presence felt.

There is a wide age range in

Bearsden Choir and some younger voices undoubtedly help produce the bright soprano sound. The two young soloists also make memorable contributions, firstly Mawhinney, particularly in duo with Amy Turner's oboe in the fifth movement, Domine Deus, Rex Coelestis, and then Cousland on the deeply moving Domine Deus, Agnus Dei with cello and chamber organ continuo.

If current progress against the health emergency continues, we must hope it will not be long before the members of Bearsden Choir can meet in person and audiences can enjoy their sound in Glasgow City Halls once more.

Until then, this contribution to the music on YouTube is well worth the attention of music lovers everywhere.

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