

CELEBRATION TO MUSIC AT THE MINSTER

Choral Society's Autumn Concert

Purcell & Handel's: Odes on St Cecilia's Day

On 21st November, members of the Axminster and District Choral Society were joined by outstanding soloists and orchestral players to make music for St Cecilia's Day.

And what music it was: two settings of Dryden's Ode to St Cecilia composed by Purcell (1692) and Handel (1739), their different interpretations given full colour under the baton of the charismatic Director of Music, Judy Martin.

The choir's performance rose to new heights – disciplined, sensitive and responsive, all eyes on the conductor and precise with their entrances and exits. The men in particular deserve a special mention for their confident performance. This was not a purely choral concert; it was also an orchestral tour de force.

Soloists were both singers and players, all superb professionals providing the audience with the very best of musical expertise. Purcell's Ode offers a chance to all instruments, including the voice, to shine, and shine they did.

Soprano Chloe Stratta, Countertenor Laurence Blyth, Tenor Michael Graham and Baritone Julian Rippon held sway through much of the work, nimbly joined by Peter Parshall for the Bass section. Let these among themselves contest, leaving his familiar seat at the organ.

Although Handel's music is more baroque in style, both versions are true to Dryden's depiction of the instruments, turning the spotlight on violin, viol (cello), flute, fife (trumpet), and organ as each is mentioned by name.

Handel's setting, for choir, soprano and tenor, may be fuller in texture overall than Purcell's, but nobody will forget the exquisite rendering of the aria 'But oh! what art can teach with the soprano voice soaring above a delicate combination of cello and organ accompaniment.' This concert was dedicated to the memory of Father John Streeting, an enthusiastic supporter of the Society. He would have loved this presentation of 'perfect harmony'.

Sydie Bones