

With Strings Attached

a review of the concert 22nd April 2023

The Stamford Bridge Singers, under the leadership of Stuart Nettleship and with Nicholas Page as the keyboard accompanist, delighted a packed-out Village Hall with a concert entitled "With Strings Attached".

This was the first concert the choir had given for a while, and it was poignant for two main reasons: shortly before the concert the choir were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Michael Catterick, a longstanding member of the choir, and a past librarian and chairperson. The first two pieces were sung in his memory: Bruckner's *Locus Iste*. Michael had enjoyed singing with the choir for over 20 years and had sung this piece many times, and then as a complete contrast *All you need is Love*, by the Beatles, which was the last piece Michael sang with the choir, at a wedding, two days before his death. In both pieces the choir remembered Michael, and his wife Evelyn, for their commitment to the choir, but also for Michael's sense of fun.

The second poignant reason was that this was Stuart's final concert, before his retirement in the summer after nine years as Musical Director. There are still two evensongs, a funeral and a wedding for the choir to sing in, but this was his final concert, and it was fitting that one of the soloists was Charlotte, his daughter, in his arrangement of David Bowie's *Life on Mars* and the eerily strange Gollum's song. Stuart has continually challenged the choir to produce a wide variety of music, often taking the choir well out of their comfort zone. A lot of the music Stuart has especially arranged for the choir, with very imaginative and interesting settings, and often, as in this case, with a string orchestra.

The string orchestra, The East Riding Sinfonia, was ably led by an old friend of the choir, Robert Webb. They provided expert sympathetic accompaniment to the choir in a number of items, as well as very moving tribute to Michael Catterick – Stuart's arrangement for strings of the song *I'll see you again* which Evelyn was going to sing. One of the many highlights was Bach's concerto for two violins, played by Robert and Beatriz Carbonell. This was a delight, and music making of a very high standard. The slow movement did move at least one listener nearly to tears, as it was so beautifully played with such warmth and lyricism.

There were a number of solo items, sung by members of the choir, which highlighted the real talent and versatility of the choir. Among the soloists was Nicola, whose arrangement of *Close to You* is a popular addition to the choir's repertoire. She was also the soloist in Stuart's arrangement of *Amazing Grace*, and this was particularly special and moving. Paul was a very louche Master of the House in the *Les Misérables* medley, which also featured former members of the choir who were invited on stage to sing through this wonderful medley. In the very final piece, *Make our Garden Grow from Candide* by Leonard Bernstein the married couple in the music, singing about their life together, was sung by Fiona and Alan, a real married couple, although whether they do chop wood is open to question!

A special mention should be made of the tenors and basses, who opened the second half, by coming down off their lofty perches on the stage to give a spirited rendition of Noel Coward's amusing *There*

are Bad Times just around the Corner. This included the line: “ if England is a garden, we ought to have more manure”.

The concert was much appreciated by the large audience, and it was a great showcase of the work and musicianship of the choir.