

## DAZZLING CHORAL PROWESS

Only five weeks after a moving Remembrance Day Concert, Wokingham Choral Society gave an outstandingly polished performance of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* on 16 December in the Great Hall, University of Reading.

Unlike the *St Matthew* and *St John Passions*, the *Oratorio* was written to be performed over six feast days between Christmas and Epiphany. Nowadays, however, it is usual to select parts of the extensive score to create a programme of suitable duration. The Society's Musical Director, Patrick Allies, choose four of the parts, telling a coherent story of Christ's birth, the annunciation to the shepherds, the adoration of the child and the Magi bestowing gifts.

In his *Oratorio* Bach employed richly varied resources to stunning effect. The Hampstead Chamber Orchestra, with period instruments, played the orchestral sequences and accompanied the choir with their customary dramatic intensity and refinement, supported brilliantly by Benedict Lewis-Smith on the harpsichord. The choir was well balanced and incisive and captured perfectly the contrasting moods of the reflective chorales and the distinctive choruses, including representations of shepherds and angels. The Christmas story as such was told by four soloists, all gifted products of the Royal College and Academy of Music, led by the tenor, Hiroshi Amako, as a sonorous Evangelist.

The evening was truly exceptional, even by Wokingham Choral Society's high standards. The choir returns to the Great Hall with the Hampstead Chamber Orchestra to perform Handel's *Messiah* on Saturday 24 March 2018, an occasion not to be missed.

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