

Requiems from France

Doncaster Choral Society's spring concert, Priory Methodist Church (20 March) comprised two works, both of them settings of the Requiem Mass, owing much to plainsong, by two French composers, Gabriel Fauré and Maurice Duruflé, separated in their first appearances by almost sixty years (1888-1947). Fauré's setting, always highly regarded by musicians, has "leapt up the ratings" during my own sixty-odd years of listening to music and has been performed a number of times by the DCS. Duruflé, rather more advanced harmonically, as one would expect, owes, again surprisingly, a good deal to Fauré's. The two together make a rather short concert and the musical content of the evening was over before 9.15pm. (If this pairing was to be repeated, Fauré's early appealing *Cantique de Jean Racine* might well be added).

(NB It was intended to have either an orchestral piece or an organ solo but circumstances prevented it)

But, as my tailor is fond of observing, "Never mind the length, feel the quality." And there was plenty of quality to revel in. the Society has had its tribulations during the past few months which has seen the departure of Alan East, Conductor for several years and a consequent reduction in rehearsal time available for this concert. Several friends of the Society have however rallied to its cause: David Houlder, Simon Lindley and last, but not least, Carey Williams, who was once upon a time the Society's Deputy conductor and who conducted on the night, drawing singing of passion, commitment and – dare I say? – triumph, from a chorus of 62 voices. True, and unsurprisingly, there were one or two glitches here and there, especially in the Duruflé, but overall these were performances of much beauty (as has been said, these Requiem settings, Fauré's particularly, take the pain out of death as both reduce the *Dies Irae* to small proportions) and excitement in the climactic moments. It seemed that the Society was determined to put recent worries behind it and in so doing were indebted to Carey Williams, who has long been celebrated – in all concerts, for whoever – for producing notable results from comparatively little rehearsal, by his sheer energy, enthusiasm and, let it be said, wide-ranging musicianship.

The accompaniment was in the hands of the South Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra (leader Ken Mitchell), just 17 strong on the night; various accompaniments are available for both works and those used here employed fewer instruments than some. Nevertheless much of the fastidious instrumental colour, which illuminates both Requiems was satisfyingly realised; the experienced and reliable organist Jonathan Gooing reminded us that both works, and particularly Duruflé, owed much to their gestation to the 'king of instruments'.

The soloists made a noteworthy contribution. David Townend (bass), making his second appearance of the season for the DCS, appeared in both works (the *Domine Jesu Christe* and *Libera me* sections in each case) and impressed with the virility and poise of his delivery. Fauré's *Pie Jesu* was sung with great credit by two Minster choristers, Adam Wright and Jack Parkinson; the corresponding section in Duruflé is assigned to a mezzo-soprano and it was a pleasure to welcome back another one-time soloist with the Society, Karin Lucas, whose reading of this lovely movement was memorable and well supported by the cello obbligato player.

A first-rate evening, then, pleasingly well supported by the public, despite rainy weather.

Orpheus