

FRESH LIGHT ON CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Carol concerts tend to be predictable and audiences like them that way. This is not to say that the choirs putting them on, and their musical directors should not try to introduce not merely fresh music but also a fresh approach. This was certainly the case with Doncaster Choral Society's seasonal offering at Priory Methodist Church on 11 December.

In recent times some DCS concerts have featured Simon Lindley as Musical Director (since the last concert, November's *Creation*, this has happily, been confirmed as permanent) and David Houlder as organ accompanist. For this carol concert the roles were reversed, and successfully so. Mr. Houlder drew intelligent, enjoyable singing from a chorus of not much more than forty voices. Highlights for me were William Mathias' *Sir Christèmas*, which had genuine bite but resisted the temptation to go too far "over the top", a John Rutter new to me, *Down in Yon Forest*, Mr Houlder's own setting of *Silent Night*, much of whose interest lay in the astringent organ accompaniment, and the sonorous *Resonemus laudibus*. He introduced all items interestingly and with commendable brevity, highlighting the Cambridge connections of much of the repertoire. (Mr. Houlder himself at Gonville and Caius College in his youth). Not least attractive of this "Cambridge connection" was Boris Ord's tiny *Adam lay y-bounden*.

Mr. Lindley's accompaniments were spicy, musical and full of interest, not least in the Houlder and Rutter arrangements mentioned (in the latter he contributes the baritone solo as well). His two organ solo spots both delighted; *In Dulce Jubilo*, in plain harmony, then as a chorale prelude, and finally as a choral fantasia, an imaginative miniature suite; and, new to me, Bonnet's *Rhapsodies sur deux Noël's*, an intriguing combination of *O Come all ye faithful* and the Provencal tune familiar from the Prelude and Farandole from Bizet's *L'Arlésienne* – a delightful, almost improvisatory piece.

The great artistes were the Choristers of Doncaster Minster, twelve of them on the night, under Director of Music Darren Williams. It was a happy idea to invite them, not only because Mr. Williams has in the past two years or so shown himself to be such a keen and capable choir trainer, but also because the DCS, in its over 120 years of history (counting that of its predecessor, the Doncaster Musical Society), had, from time to time, an important connection with St. George's. I would like to think that this was entering a new phase beneficial to both Society and Minster. The four principal items sung by the choristers were clearly carefully prepared and confidently delivered. Composers represented were Michael Head, Arnold Cooke (now "the Yorkshire Hindemith"), Simon Lindley, who of course accompanied his own now popular *Ave Maria*, and Reger (more delightful registration in the organ accompaniment). And in two DCS items – *Past three a'clock* and *Silent Night* – choristers supplied brief, but telling, contributions.

Congratulations to everyone for shedding fresh and stimulating light on largely familiar fare. In a word, this was fun.

ORPHEUS