



Thornbury Orchestra: Summer Concert Review

14 June 2008, St Mary's Church, Thornbury

By David Shaw

Since its formation in 2002, Thornbury Orchestra has made huge strides in competence and confidence under their conductor Christopher Hill. This was amply demonstrated in this excellent concert which attracted a good sized audience to Thornbury's magnificent Parish Church. This is an excellent venue as far as acoustics are concerned but probably the most uncomfortable venue in the town as far as seating is concerned. I am sure I am not alone in longing for the day when the pews are replaced with comfortable chairs!

The concert started with *Le Cid* Ballet Music (Massenet). *Le Cid* is an opera composed by Massenet in Paris in 1885 and this suite of pieces was an inspired choice to start the programme since it featured many sections of the orchestra enabling the audience to appreciate their individual skills.

The first half of the concert was concluded with Mussorgsky's famous "Pictures at an Exhibition". This is a well-known but extremely demanding piece technically. The orchestra was stretched to its technical limits performing this work, but they "pulled it off" and the overall effect was most satisfactory and provided a good talking point during the interval in which the audience were supplied with a complementary glass of wine!

The second half of the concert started with the conductor once again displaying his sartorial skills when he appeared resplendent in a Union Flag waistcoat, presumably celebrating the Queen's Birthday! This half of the concert contained music for all tastes, including material written for, or used by, television programmes and films. The first piece was from "The Wasps" – written by Vaughan Williams in 1909. Probably not many had heard this before and it was an exciting and jolly way to start the second half. This was followed by Eric Coates' famous "Dam Busters March". Here, the orchestra sounded at their very best and played with confidence and sensitive dynamics. They followed the conductor admirably when he varied tempi and the audience showed their appreciation of the famous piece. John Williams' music for the film "ET" followed. This again is a famous example of good British film music which was enjoyed and appreciated by the audience and the orchestra rose well to the huge challenges of this piece. The theme of British music was kept for the next item which was "Jupiter" from Holst's "Planet Suite". The orchestra did seem to be under some considerable strain in this piece, although the brass and percussion sections were excellent. But this is not intended to be harsh criticism. Jupiter is the bringer of Jollity and this was certainly conveyed to the audience most satisfactorily.

Khachaturian's beautiful "Adagio" from his ballet "Spartacus" was superbly played throughout. The woodwind section excelled as did the strings, who played sonorously and sensually throughout the piece – just what was needed in this emotive and evocative music.

The concert concluded with William Walton's magnificent coronation march "Crown Imperial". Again, the orchestra seemed to be very well-suited to this music and it was certainly a triumphant end to what had been an extremely enjoyable concert. Well done, Thornbury Orchestra!

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