

## **Joyous sound as choir brings magical Joubert gloriously to life; Birmingham Bach Choir CBSO Centre \*\*\*\***

The hardest thing for a newly-premiered piece is usually to receive a second performance.

In the case of John Joubert's Five Songs of Incarnation, tomorrow afternoon BBC Radio 3 broadcasts this magical work's fourth performance from four different choirs in as many weeks since its first airing in Birmingham Cathedral.

Its third performance came on Saturday as the centrepiece of a wonderfully joyous programme from the hardworking Birmingham Bach Choir. This was the version where the five medieval settings can be heard without the linking solo tenor narrative from St John's Gospel, and it works very well. It was intriguing, too, to hear the work given by a mixed choir after its all-male premiere.

Joubert's structure impresses with its architectural inevitability, and its keystone central movement glows with an almost Brahmsian lyricism. Diction under Neil Ferris, an exciting young conductor making his full-scale debut with the choir, was commendably clear, and Jenni Crawford took solos originally intended for boy soprano with appealing presence.

There were other Joubert works in this concert which marked the official end of Joubertiade 2007, celebrating this loved and respected composer's 80th birthday. Torches sounded appropriately earthy with rugged accompaniment from the Fine Arts Brass Ensemble, There is no Rose showed the choir's skill in unaccompanied singing, and there was a nice surprise with the almost forgotten, infinitely tender He that is down need fear no fall. And we heard another new work, My Heart Danceth by the Herefordshire-based Eleanor Alberga. This is a demanding piece for unaccompanied chorus, but its rewards are genuine, not least in the infectiously rhythmic "my heart danceth for joy" section. I can imagine this being performed by much smaller groups, but here the Birmingham Bach Choir can congratulate itself on a good job well done.

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