

Purcell's music done proud

Purcell: A 350th Birthday Tribute

Canberra Choral Society, Llewellyn Hall, November 7.

Reviewer: **Jennifer Gall**

I had not expected so much delight in one concert. Each item revealed new pleasures for the listener. The joyous trumpet entry in the *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* established the sound of the 17th century. Fine playing by Julie Watson and the brass section throughout the concert maintained the flavour of this era and formed a most satisfying counterbalance to the strings and woodwinds of the excellent chamber orchestra led by Barbara Gilby.

Birthday Ode for Queen Mary: Come Ye Sons of Art reminded us of Purcell's significant role as court musician. In *Sound the Trumpet*, the duet by counter tenors Tobias Cole and David Yardley made sparkling music. Yardley reached a new level in this performance, singing with relaxed confidence. Once Cole appears on stage the listener cannot sit back in detachment.

His solo, *Strike the Viol* was captivating, the ear wooed into contemplation of the sound, texture and sensation of each note. Accompanied later by cello and harpsichord, Cole recreated the intimacy of the golden age of the counter tenor with two songs. First was *Music for a while shall all your cares beguile* from *Oedipus*. Less



languid than Alfred Deller's interpretation, Cole's animated delivery of the sinuous melody line kept the listener following each syllable with utter concentration. *Sweeter Than Roses* from *Pausanias* conveyed the seductive scented summer air of long vanished evening and the

unforgettable passion unleashed by a kiss.

Te Deum Laudamus was a splendid finale to the first half. Bass, Benjamin Connor introduced the piece and delivered the low notes "And Earth" with fitting gravity. One could imagine God would be inclined to answer

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prayers offered in such a beautiful musical setting. In *Come Follow Me* from *King Arthur* the soloists skilfully balanced and interwove their lines to ignite the arrangement. Sonia Anfiloff's vocal intensity and colour shone in this piece. David Mackay opened the series of excerpts from *Dido and Aeneas*. This was a welcome opportunity to hear his warm tenor voice in a setting that showed off his talents beyond the earlier, more florid material.

Karen Fitzgibbon has a voice and artistry that I would willingly travel many miles to experience. I watched her onstage preparing for her entry to *When I am Laid in Earth*, as she visibly entered into the character of Dido, assuming the appearance of woe so superbly expressed in her vocal solo. Her opening notes for each phrase entered directly from Purcell's corner of heaven; slipping into the air to grow in depth and purity of sound.

Funeral Music for Queen Mary concluded the concert, prefaced and ended by a sombre drum processional. So affective was the performance that as the final drum beats died into the eternal silence of death, the modern audience paused in sorrowful reflection for Queen Mary's passing, before offering enthusiastic applause. If we consider that Purcell was 37 when he died, the freshness and majesty of the music he produced is all the more remarkable. The Canberra Choral Society did him proud.