

Review: Ottawa Choral Society
Richard Todd, The Ottawa Citizen
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It's the time of year now when a lot of Ottawa musical organizations, especially the choruses, are wrapping up their seasons. Last night it was the Ottawa Choral Society under conductor Matthew Larkin. They offered a program of Kodaly, Vaughan Williams and more Vaughan Williams before an audience of about 500 in Dominion-Chalmers Church.

Conductor Matthew Larkin opened the program with Zoltan Kodaly's 1947 *Missa Brevis*. Although it exists in several settings, last night's performance was for chorus, soloists (drawn from within the choir) and organ. The latter was played by Teresa van den Boogaard, organist and music director at Dominion-Chalmers, who managed the often-thorny accompaniment with aplomb.

The Choral Society sang well, too, albeit with a few ragged entries and other minor blemishes. The solo singing, inevitably of variable quality, was more often solid than otherwise.

The rest of the program was given to the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams, beginning with his *Songs of Travel*, sung by the wonderfully dark-voiced baritone Justin Welsh and expertly accompanied by Larkin on the piano. These songs are always a pleasure, but one seldom gets to hear them done in a low voice.

After the intermission, the choir returned to sing the Vaughan Williams *Te Deum*, once again with the accompaniment of organist van den Boogaard. It was another solid performance, full of the joy and pride of a nation's success in war, which is the circumstance for which most *Te Deums* were traditionally written.

The choir took a break while Larkin took to the organ console and played the *Three Chorale Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes*.

These are fine pieces, previously unfamiliar to this listener, and well worth getting to know. Larkin's readings made a strong case for them, and also gave the audience the opportunity to enjoy his estimable keyboard skills. This is one kind of repertoire in which he particularly excels.

The program concluded with the Vaughan Williams *Mass in G minor*.

Last night's program booklet included an insert describing the Choral Society's 2008-2009 season. It will include three of the society's own productions, one of them consisting of High Renaissance music, and another including a new piece by the society's music director, Matthew Larkin.

Also, the society will be busy singing with the National Arts Centre Orchestra, including the *Requiems of Mozart and Brahms* and *Handel's Messiah*