

Chch City Choir



HANDEL'S MESSIAH: REVIEW

Reviewed by Patrick Shepherd in The Press, 7 December 2014

The Messiah. Christchurch City Choir, Christchurch Symphony Orchestra and University of Canterbury Vocal Consort, conductor Andrew Withington with Madeleine Pierard (soprano), Sarah Court (mezzo), Simon O'Neill (tenor), Jared Holt (baritone), James Tibbles (harpsichord) and Martin Setchell (organ). Charles Luney Auditorium, St Margaret's College, Saturday, December 6. Reviewed by Patrick Shepherd.

A perennial favourite in the concert calendar, Handel's Messiah is for many the signal that Christmas is on its way and for me this would rank amongst one of the most memorable. There was an intimacy about this performance that really connected, firstly in a venue that brought performers and audience closer together but also in the many musical decisions that contributed to a stunning performance.

Much of this can be attributed to the vision and energy of musical director Andrew Withington. This performance capped off a stellar first year for Withington at the helm and his passion and enjoyment of the whole night radiated from the podium. Intonation was spot on, the ensemble tight and the diction crisp throughout and one got the sense that every single performer shared Withington's belief that singing is not only alive and well in the city but veritably flourishing.

Withington gathered a top line of soloists for the occasion – Simon O'Neill, Jared Holt, Madeleine Pierard and Sarah Court. It's hard to take your eyes off O'Neill, he has that musical magnetism, opening the work confidently but also with an emotional bracket in part two. Holt was excellent and the fire he brought to Why Do the Nations Furiously Rage and the concluding The Trumpet Shall Sound was impressive. The latter was also notable for the superb trumpet playing of Thomas Eves.

The expressiveness of both Pierard and Court connected well with the audience. Pierard's moving Come Unto Him and I Know That My Redeemer Liveth both highlights, as was Court's But Who May Abide for the power in the lower register.

The chamber forces for the orchestra were a necessity in this venue and provided clarity while continuous support from James Tibbles and Martin Setchell was unerring. Altogether a terrific way to start the build-up to Christmas.