



What they say about *Caritas*

Dr Peter Harland is organist at Little St Mary's, Cambridge, Director of Music at St Andrew's, Cherry Hinton, and Administrator at the Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge University. He had these words to say about our concert in Little St Mary's on 21 April 2012:

“Canterbury Caritas Choir sang a wide range of works by composers such as Bruckner, Palestrina, Mendelssohn, Holst, Harris and Parry.

“Of particular interest was a composition, entitled *War in Heaven* by their director Benedict Preece. This was a powerful work and the music fitted the words well.

“Throughout the concert the music was sung to a very high standard. The words came across clearly and the choir used the acoustic of the building to great effect. The choir showed great team spirit in the way they so obviously enjoyed the music which they sang with great feeling. The organist who accompanied played to high standard and chose effective registrations for the music.

“I strongly recommend attending a concert or service sung by this excellent choir.”

Our second concert was Petham, July 2011, raising money for Petham Church. Steve Portman, international conductor and concert pianist, said of the choir:

“A concert by a new choir (Caritas Chamber Choir) and a very new conductor, Benedict Preece, in the not oversized but very accommodating (and full) church in Petham. The restricted parking facilities forced me to park some distance from the church and made me late, so the first impression of the choir was of a surprisingly lovely sweep of well-in-tune and homogeneous song rising up the hill. The second piece sounded even better through the door of the church while I waited outside.

“Upon entering I found a chamber choir of twenty or so members of mixed ages who were concentrated throughout and enthusiastic about their music, with a very musical and skilled conductor who is nineteen years old! He was a poised master of ceremonies and skilled beyond his years in directing the proceedings. The program was mixed between *à cappella* and organ-accompanied music, (the very competent organist was Michael Cooke) and went off smoothly and professionally, with a word or two about each of the well chosen pieces. Three of the choir members sang solos in both the Fauré *Requiem* selections, and the *Blessed be the God and Father*. They were mother and son Kate and John Brazier and Zachary Starr, who sang with real pleasure and complimented the proceedings admirably.

“The whole concert went off in a relaxed but serious atmosphere, the acoustics complimented the singers and the balance between the size of the room and the size of the choir permitted an easily produced and expressive sound which the audience seemed sincerely to appreciate.

“All in all, with the varied refreshments and drinks served after the event, I’m sure it represented a genuinely enjoyable way to spend a summer's evening, and further concerts by this group merit attendance by anyone with the time available to attend. My compliments!”

About our Christmas Concert:

Caritas' Lovely Christmas Choir Concert: Review by Stephen Portman

“Petham hosted a bright and shining local cultural addition in the recently formed Caritas Chamber Choir. *Caritas* have, in a very short period, established themselves as belonging to a much higher than common level of local ensembles. This is the result of the choir members' competence, and a young conductor who feels music strongly and has the manual expressiveness to communicate it to them.

“The program was very nicely varied both in period and chronology, and retained interest because of its variety and the obvious musicality with which it was conducted. In fact, the conductor himself contributed two of the highest points of the evening with two of his own compositions, and *Alleluja Sanctificatus* and a *Hodie Christus Natus Est*. The first had lovely sustained and suspended lyricism, and the second was a complex and demanding catching and memorable work. These were especially well sung, and showed the real support Mr. Preece enjoys from his colleagues in the choir. They should become regular features of future Christmas concerts.

“The first pieces, by Palestrina, were sung from the back of the congregation, and the sound was very fresh and evenly balanced even as the choir walked forward.

“I especially enjoyed Poston's *Jesus Christ the Apple Tree*, Gardner's *Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day*, and two surprisingly bright and well sung selections from Handel's *Messiah*, which finished the program. The *Hallelujah Chorus*, even in such a confined space, was genuinely exciting, taken in a forthright and brisk tempo and sung by a very confident ensemble.

“The organist for the concert was Michael Cooke, and the enjoyable solo singing in several pieces added important parts to a very enjoyable evening of music.”

An email from Canon John Weetman of Selby Abbey following our concert there

“Thank you all very much for dropping in – I've not heard such a superb sound in the Abbey since I've been here – it was quite a revelation as to how the building really ‘sings’ in the right hands (or voices!)

“I appreciate that there wasn't a very large audience for you, but those who were there were extremely appreciative and impressed. If you were to come again then I'm sure you'd have a number of enthusiastic ambassadors here who'd encourage others to come, plus we'd presumably have more time to spread the word.”



About our concert on 12 February in St Peter's Church, Canterbury

“Last Sunday evening, 12 February, in the historic St. Peter's Church in Canterbury, the Caritas Chamber Choir gave a warm and dynamic performance. Elegantly directed by Benedict Preece, an alumnus of the Canterbury Cathedral Choir, *Caritas* offered a well-designed program of German sacred music that was inspired or influenced by the early baroque composer, Heinrich Schütz. Being a lover of Schütz and his contemporaries, I was glad to hear the lovely *Selig sind die Toten* presented so musically and sensitively at the beginning of the program. Following the Schütz, *Caritas* offered the seldom-performed Op. 109 *Fest- und Gedenksprüche* (Festival and Memorial Verses) of Brahms. These are remarkable little gems, written for double chorus (8 voices). They were excellent show pieces for the choir, displaying the sense of ensemble within the group and providing much drama and excitement in the intimate space of St. Peter's. Dynamic contrasts were effective and well-executed, entrances and cutoffs were crisp and clean, and the German diction was quite clear and precise. Following the Brahms was another 8-part challenge: the absolutely exquisite *Mass in Eb* by Rheinberger (1839-1901). Once again, I give credit to the choir for a very tight ensemble.

“To finish the evening with a flourish, two members of the choir stepped out to play continuo (organ and 'cello) for the well-known and well-loved *Lobet den Herrn* motet by Bach. It was a lively way to end this rich and varied program. The audience was most appreciative, and after long applause, the choir offered us an encore performance of the most vivacious of the Brahms selections. It was even more dramatic, more exciting, infused with more joy and energy when sung as the evening's encore. I think it's safe to say that the audience didn't mind a few chilled toes on this cold winter night. It was well worth braving the icy temperatures to hear these beautiful masterpieces of German sacred music sung very well by Caritas Chamber Choir.”

Holly Boaz

Holly is an American soprano with a repertoire ranging from J S Bach to Samuel Barber. She has a website at <http://www.hollyboaz.com/>