

Great Day as choirs produce glorious harmony

BERMUDA FESTIVAL REVIEW

by Louise Folster

Christ Church Cathedral Choir
with the Bermuda Institute School Choir
Ruth Seaton James Centre for the Performing Arts

OXFORD'S Christ Church Cathedral Choir made an unforgettable debut at the Bermuda Festival on Tuesday evening. This uniquely combined choir of professional singers, Oxford undergraduates and young treble voices from the cathedral choir school achieved a soaring serenity from the moment they opened their mouths.

Although the venue was a far cry from the vaulted grandeur of their musical home, Oxford's 12th-century cathedral, the choir's transcendent performance transported us there. Sufficient acoustical advantage was achieved by this fine ensemble in the Ruth Seaton James auditorium to produce this wondrous sound.

In honour of the Bermuda Festival's celebration of Bermuda's 400th anniversary the programme began with music composed by one of England's foremost early composers, William Byrd (1543-1623). As introduced by the choir's director, Stephen Darlington, *Rorate coeli* was written shortly before or about the time of the island's first settlement. Here the crystal clarity of the individual voice with its faultless diction shone out at moments whilst at others all voices were combined to reach sensual depths of glorious harmony, producing a robust and vivacious sound.

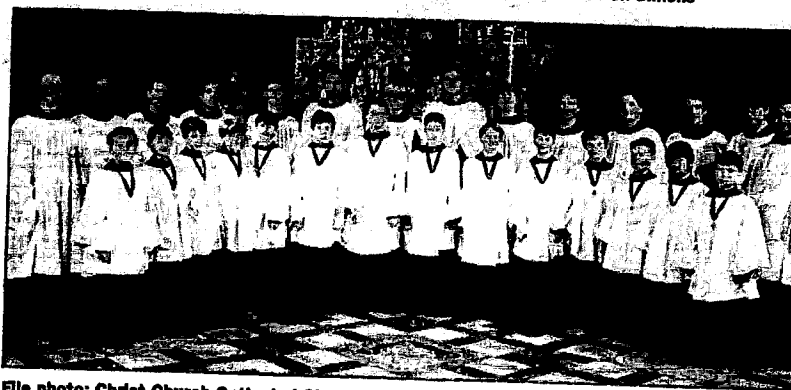
Following Mr. Darlington's most welcome, comprehensive and entertaining description of the programme's featured early composers, the evening's performance continued with two further a cappella, liturgical choral works: Thomas Tallis's reflective *Salvator mundi* and Thomas Weelkes' vivacious and dynamic *Hosanna to the Son of David* with its captivating, cascading harmonies.

The solo voice featured next when baritone Greg Skidmore performed three songs from *Songs of Travel* by the celebrated 20th-century British composer Vaughan Williams, who was greatly inspired by the works of his Renaissance predecessors. This was a bravura performance of depth and power with perfect projection where not a word was lost. The solo voice was tenderly accompanied by pianist Clive Driskill-Smith in a rendition where the dynamics of voice and piano were beautifully and mutually sustaining.

The Bermuda Institute School Choir took to the stage next - in fact, took up all of the stage. This was an ample and elegantly dressed ensemble. Under the steadfast direction of Owen Simons, it produced a vibrant, rich sound and gave an all-round uplifting performance. John



On song: The Bermuda Institute School Choir under the direction of Owen Simons



File photo: Christ Church Cathedral Choir

Rutter's *Look at the World* and Glenn Burleigh's spiritual *Jesus is a Rock* were delivered with great conviction with the whole choir swaying to the infectious beat of the latter.

The concert's second act commenced with some of the well-loved classics of 19th-century France. The Christ Church Cathedral Choir returned to the stage and continued with *Cantique de Jean Racine* by Gabriel Faure, giv-



Stephen Darlington: Director of the Christ Church Cathedral Choir

ing a performance which was simply glorious in all its melodious munificence. Cesar Franck's famous setting of *Panis angelicus* left few dry eyes in the house given the captivating recital achieved by the choir's 16 boy choristers with their soaring treble voices. *The Heavens are Telling* from Joseph Haydn's *Creation* made for a divinely transcendent end to Christ Church's presentation.

FOLLOWING a moving, if understated, performance of Donald Lawrence's spiritual *Say a Prayer for Me* by Bermuda Institute soloist Lauren Easton, both choirs returned to the stage to sing together. Christ Church Cathedral Choir may be 500 years old, but as it proved here, it is justly deserving of its reputation for youthfulness and versatility.

Two spirituals, *Great Day* by Moses Hogan and *A Jubilant Song* by Allen Pote, were followed by the famous *Hallelujah Chorus* from Handel's *Messiah*, the technical demands of which were handled remarkably well by so many varied voices. Here was a touching blending of these two quite different choirs, proving, as Mr. Darlington said, that music is an international language.

Each and every voice contributed to this glorious harmony of delicious vocal colour. The choirs were summoned back for an encore of *Great Day*. How apt, for so it was.

Pianist and organist Clive Driskill-Smith will give an organ recital this evening at St. John's Church in Pembroke for the Bermuda Festival.

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ON SONG: Choirs join up for rousing Festival performance



Picture: K.T. Bruce

Members of the Christ Church Cathedral Choir and Bermuda Institute School Choir sing together at the Bermuda Festival. Review: See page 18