

Thundering towards Judgement Day – in perfect unison

ST JAMES shook on Saturday as 130 singers and orchestral players from the Guernsey Choral and Orchestral Society and the Evangelische Kantorei Biberach unleashed the power and glory of Giuseppe Verdi's Requiem.

The visit by the Biberach singers was organised by the Friends of Biberach Society to mark the bond of friendship and spirit of reconciliation that has grown between our two communities. Described by one critic as an 'opera in disguise', Verdi's Requiem is perhaps best known for the Dies Irae, a sonically awe-inspiring imagining of the day of judgement, which is a thrumming reactor at the heart of the piece; wormwood that colours the work as a whole. From the tight, poised opening of the Requiem and Kyrie Eleison to the final intonations of the Libera Me, a sense of tension wove throughout the piece.

This is not to suggest unrelenting gloom, though. We were treated to beautifully simple and captivating singing in movements such as the Agnus Dei, when the choir sang as a single entity in unison. At other moments orchestral music joyously sprang forth, playfully

VERDI'S REQUIEM

The Guernsey Choral and Orchestral Society and the Evangelische Kantorei Biberach

St James, 11 May

REVIEWED BY ED JEWELL

echoing fairground carousels in the Sanctus.

Given the short time the two choirs have been rehearsing together, their performance as a unit was particularly impressive, perhaps best demonstrated in the equally tricky unison and fugue passages of the Libera Me.

The relationship between choir and conductor Helen Grand delivered a skilful interpretation of the work, where deft shifting of tempo gave character and purpose to the music.

The four guest soloists added an operatic flavour. Soprano Alison Roddy's voice crackled with emotion, delivering entrancing sostenuto notes in the Libera Me, while tenor and bass soloists Stephen



The soloists from the Evangelische Kantorei Biberach and a flautist from the Guernsey Choral and Orchestral Society. (Pictures by Steve Sarre, 1322712, 1322714)



Avis and Lancelot Nomura both gave powerful, assured performances. Mezzo soprano Kassandra Dimopoulou was genuinely exciting to watch, as she shifted from terrifying fury in the Dies Irae to transcendental composure in the Lux aeterna. The orchestra played a fundamental role, from the trumpeters hidden in the gallery ready to pronounce the day of judgement to the percussionists, intensely

concentrating to ensure judgement didn't arrive a beat too soon. It was wonderful to see four bassoons on stage, their wry tones prodding the tempo forward and puncturing the operatic pomp. Later in the summer the Guernsey Choral and Orchestral Society will travel to Biberach for a performance of Dvorak's Mass in D major. On the strength of this performance, I would book flights now.