

Arts Association Welcomes City Choir

Lochgilthead Parish Church was the venue on Sunday afternoon for the Mid Argyll Arts Association's (MAAA) December concert featuring The Glasgow Phoenix Choir, who delivered A Christmas Celebration, writes Helen Samborek.

This turned out to be a celebration of much more than Christmas with nearly two hours of song from the choir's seasonal programme providing something for all musical tastes.

The sacred selection included Will Todd's arrangement of The Lord is My Shepherd, with the insistent refrain of 'show me' getting the audience's attention after hearing a contemplative Be Thou My Vision.

All In the April Evening took us briefly away from thoughts of December, despite the Christmas tree behind them, focusing on the first of three soloists opening the piece.

A selection of Scots song gave the audience their chance to participate, joining in Highland Cathedral, having enjoyed a solo performance of Ae Fond Kiss, arranged by conductor Cameron Murdoch, and a rousing rendition of Scots Wha Hae.

The choir's interpretation of the arrangements for the National Youth Choir of Scotland of The Skye Boat Song, and Westering Home, brought the first half to an end.

The Christmas element took hold in the second half, with Joy to the World setting a bright start and everyone joining in Good King Wenceslas.

If we thought the upbeat and fun selection – Dixie and Buffalo Gals – balanced with a more enigmatic Shenandoah, and the final song from the modern choral section was an arrangement by John Rutter of Joshua Fit the Battle kept us wondering what might come next.

From the seasonal section traditional carols, including In the Bleak Mid-Winter, Ding dong Merrily on High and Sans Day Carol filled the space with the sound of Christmas.

If the percussion in The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy, in lieu of a steel band, and the ringing of the Jingle Bells was not enough to bring on the Christmas spirit, then the solo performance of the accompanist Mathew McIlree on the piano gave Let it Snow a lively and unexpected rag time rendition that got the loudest applause of all.

Finally, the Goff Richards arrangement of A Very, Merry Christmas suite was there to persuade everyone that we 'all need a little Christmas'.

Although there would be many who left with well-known tunes in their heads, it was the new work, Opening, performed in the second half, that had the potential to leave a more lasting impression.

Commissioned for the choir's 70th anniversary and not yet published, this will be a piece that choirs can enjoy singing in the future, as future was the message.

Composed by Bob Chilcott, with words by Charles Bennett, it celebrates winter being followed by spring, and the choir's pride in the rendition of their piece was obvious.

The acknowledgement in the programme of the effect that the pandemic had brought added significance, and this was demonstrated by the turnout on Sunday.

