

St. Mary's Hemel Hempstead

Lunchtime Concert

Tuesday 9th March 2010

It goes without saying that Katherine Boyce is soprano of exceptional power and beauty of tone, the fruit of an embryo talent already in evidence during her time as a chorister at St. John's, Boxmoor and rigorously nurtured since by an impressive record of study and training at the highest levels. This said I feel that, as an artist, Katherine has an asset at least as significant as any other, viz. her sheer love of singing. She filled a magical hour for us with no less than ten items, but I had a feeling that she could happily have filled a further hour with another ten pieces, so clearly was she deriving pleasure from her own performance.

Space will not permit mention of more than some of the music in the programme so this review must be selective. 'Die Nacht' by Richard Strauss is in the composer's most romantic vein, dwelling on the habit night has of 'stealing' every visible thing and fearful that it may treat the loved one in the same way. The 'Coffee Cantata' of J. S. Bach, his only secular piece in this mode, is a jolly romp in which the daughter of a despotic father assures him that her devotion to coffee makes her impervious to the threat of withdrawing privileges – except the finding of a husband. But she has the last laugh, secretly informing suitors that her acceptance of a proposal would be conditional on indulgence of her passion for coffee (a condition subsequently met, no doubt, by one lucky chap!) The nostalgic British popular song 'a Nightingale sang in Berkeley Square' was sketched out and first performed in a French pub just before the outbreak of WW2, although it quickly became a number one hit in the UK. It evokes a gentler London before German bombers attempted to pound the city to dust. All that happened long before Katherine's time, but she put her heart into the number. The recital ended on a passionate, Spanish note with the Cuatro Madrigales Amaratores by Rodrigo, a small part of the composer's prodigious output of over eighty (yes, eighty!) creative years. There must be something life enhancing in the Latin bloodstream! We will no doubt savour this again on 13th April when we will welcome back the guitars of Ian Kelleher and Sue Williams.

Before closing mention must be made of the contribution of Katherine Boyce's accompanist on this occasion. Nicholas King's brilliant musical gifts are known far and wide, and he has dazzled audiences locally (especially at St. John's Boxmoor) with virtuoso solo performances. His support for Katherine was perfect – unobtrusive, yet displaying complete artistic sympathy with singer and song.

Katherine Boyce will be the soprano soloist with the Aeolian Singers in a performance of Brahms' German Requiem on Saturday 27th March at 7.30 pm at St. John's Church, Boxmoor.