

# ***CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF St MACHAR, OLD ABERDEEN***

## ***AUTUMN CONCERTS 2023***

***Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 4.00pm***

### ***GABRIEL FAURÉ REQUIEM***

#### **The Choir of St Machar's Cathedral**

**Dr Roger B. Williams, MBE** Conductor

**Olivia Smith** Soprano

**Paul Tierney** Baritone

**Kamil Mika** Organ

**Nova Quartet:**

**Nataliia Naismith** First violin

**Erin Smith** Second violin

**Emma Alexander** viola

**Gareth John** Cello

#### **REVIEW:**

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> November being Remembrance or Armistice Sunday, *Fauré's Requiem* was an ideal choice of work for this, the first of two Autumn Concerts in St Machar's Cathedral. It is attractively tuneful throughout, reflectively gentle and comfortingly positive too, bringing together emotions that are properly fitting for this Remembrance Sunday.

Central to the performance was the magnificent Choir of St Machar's Cathedral. It is able to field a large number of superbly well balanced voices. Nowadays, particularly in Scotland, this is fairly unique, the result of hard work and splendid musicianship by the late James Lobban and now Dr Roger B. Williams. Both of them the sort of musicians who make so many people eager to come and sing for them.

Today's performance was based on a revised edition by John Rutter. I felt that it worked triumphantly well. Although there was no full orchestra, the four string players of the Nova Quartet gave us sound qualities that matched the orchestral sounds convincingly well. At one point Fauré brings in a rich surge from brass instruments. To my surprise and delight, the Nova Quartet managed to provide exactly that rich brazen sound in their playing. In the *Pie Jesu* their muted strings gave us a tenderly beautiful backing to the lovely treble solo sung so naturally and soaringly by Olivia Smith. The sense of innocence portrayed in the music was all there.

Many of Fauré's melodies are sweepingly beautiful. Both strings and choir brought that idea off terrifically well. At the beginning of the work, the organ played so brilliantly throughout by Kamil Mika, along with the strings, opened with an impressive surge of sound. Then today, the choir entered so gently and sensitively, setting the seal on the overall emotional sensitivity of the whole work. Of course in this *Offertory*, the voices rise in a splendid crescendo and that was achieved so well too. The male voices topped by the tenors were so smooth and well blended. Indeed I was

impressed by the balance of the choral sound throughout the performance. Balance was equally the watchword of what was achieved between choir and instruments without fail.

There was a magnificent violin solo at the beginning of the *Sanctus* played with real virtuosity by Nataliia Naismith. Then choir and instruments blossomed forth gloriously with *Hosanna*.

The strings flowed smoothly into the opening of the *Agnus Dei* followed by ethereal singing by the sopranos, then a surge of delightfully rich full choir and ringing organ.

Two of the most attractive highlights of the *Requiem* are the baritone solos sung today by Paul Tierney. I thought he was splendid. His light upward soaring baritone voice matched the hopeful yearnings of his words so well. His voice had warmth too and his diction was faultless. For me, his performance was a cherry on a most delicious cake.

The finale, *In Paradisum*, brought the work to an awesome conclusion with ever so light touches like little bells from Kamil Mika on the organ. Here too were rich strings and heart-warming choral singing. It took a moment or two before applause from the large St Machar's audience began. We had all been transfixed by a thoroughly captivating performance.

The next Autumn Concert will be on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> November also starting at 4pm when we will be entertained by young musicians from the Aberdeen City Music School directed by Kevin Kyle.

ALAN COOPER