

**Review of Sussex Chorus' Centenary Opera Gala concert,  
Saturday, 25 June 20 22**

'Sussex Chorus joyfully celebrated this Platinum Jubilee Year with a magnificent Opera Gala Concert in St Andrew's Church, Burgess Hill, on Saturday June 25 as part of their own Centenary commemoration. The choir's simple relish of the rollercoaster programme was palpable, from the opening National Anthem and Handel's *'Zadok the Priest'* through a raft of opera choruses to the Proms favourites of *'Land of hope and glory'* and *'Jerusalem'*, the latter two ably assisted by the full-house, enthusiastic audience. Fittingly for the occasion, this included many Alumni and notables including Mims Davies, MP, local Mayors, past Presidents and conductors and others with musical connections.

The choir were both wholly committed to the spirit of the music and well-disciplined in attention to musical detail, intonation and diction - Puccini's *'Humming Chorus'* being a novel experience for many. The admirable choice of operatic choruses, marches, drinking songs and the exquisite *'Chorus of the Hebrew slaves'* were delivered with passion and involvement.

But the evening could have been stolen by the two heavyweight operatic soloists, soprano Zita Syme and tenor Charne Rochford. Charne is a full-scale Heldentenor - those huge voices required in Grand Opera - whose magnificent presence in his renditions of Verdi and Puccini arias, especially in his heart-rending *'Nessan Dorma'*, was a privilege to experience. Zita's beautiful high register served her well in her solo arias, especially in Bellini's *'O Quante Volte'*, sensitively accompanied in part by Anna Wynne on harp. Their dramatic duets from *Boheme* and *Carmen* were riveting, attesting to many years' experience on the stage.

The real workhorses of the show were the excellent Kent Sinfonia, ably led by Iva Butler, who accompanied everything, and the Conductor Supremo, Stephen Anthony Brown, whose attuned direction of all proceedings was impeccable. Evenings of this grandeur and variety take a great deal of co-ordination and organisation and the team responsible should be congratulated on their achievement. The choir is in good hands and is developing in leaps and bounds from those dark Lockdown days. Their evident enjoyment of communal music-making is contagious and should appeal to all those out there who love to sing. The retiring collection was in aid of St Peter and St James' Hospice.'

Simon Austin