

Review / In the mood for Christmas

music / “The Star of Bethlehem”, The Llewellyn Choir, conducted by Rowan Harvey-Martin. At Wesley Uniting Church, December 17. Reviewed by Len Power



The Llewellyn Choir... clear and confident.

FOR its final concert of the year, The Llewellyn Choir presented a varied program of Christmas-related works by Peter Sculthorpe, Anton Bruckner, Andrew Ford and Joseph Rheinberger.

The program commenced with the Llewellyn Sinfonia nicely playing Sculthorpe’s “Awake, Glad Heart!”, an arrangement for chamber orchestra of the carol, “The Birthday of the King”. Next, the choir gave us two works by Bruckner, “Os justi” and “Christus Factus Est”. Singing of these dramatic works was clear and confident.

“Shepherd’s Pipe Carol”, arranged by John Rutter, was bright and amusing and this was followed by Australian Andrew Ford’s “Wassails and Lullabies”, a setting for choir and percussion of medieval carols. This challenging and unusual work proved to be the highlight of the concert. Its haunting medieval rhythms and harmonies were well sung by the choir and there was excellent work on percussion by Steve Fitzgerald and Veronica Bailey. An added bonus for those of us near a window was the sound of crows outside cawing eerily in time to the music. It’s a mystery how conductor, Rowan Harvey-Martin, managed to organise that but it worked!

After interval, the choir presented Joseph Rheinberger’s 1890 Christmas cantata, “The Star of Bethlehem”. It was accompanied by the Llewellyn Sinfonia and soloists, Rebecca Collins, soprano, and Rohan Thatcher, baritone. Beautifully performed by all, it was especially notable for its dramatic and atmospheric opening and closing movements. Soprano Rebecca Collins sang gloriously in the second and eighth movements and Rohan Thatcher’s fine, resonant baritone was heard to good effect in the fourth movement.

The concert concluded with a very familiar work, “Ding Dong! Merrily on High” with the audience invited to sing-along with the choruses. Conductor, Rohan Harvey-Martin, the choir, orchestra members and soloists certainly put us in the mood for Christmas with this concert.