

Choirs at Christmas 2019 **Angmering Chorale**

Expectations on Saturday evening of 14th December for Angmering Chorale's Annual Christmas concert held in Angmering School were for some really good quality carols from the chorale with delightful contributions from the children's' choirs interspersed with band numbers and traditional audience carols. But there was a buzz of excitement, or perhaps dread, when at the start, the leader of Goring Primary School's choir, Fiona Whittaker was invited to do a pre-concert warm up for everyone. It must have worked because the result was a fabulous evening of everyone singing and seemingly enjoying themselves, a veritable Community Carol Fest.

A highlight of the first half was Patcham Silver Band's slot where they played a Winter Fairy Tale and Jingle Bells. The children especially were fascinated watching the band, with most of them swaying to the rhythm.

The second half was devoted to Wassail! Carols of Comfort and Joy, a selection of choral arrangements of uplifting traditional carols, both sacred and secular, to be sung together by adult and children's choirs compiled by Alexander L'Estrange in 2017. The first song was an arrangement of the Sussex Carol, it was lovely listening to children and adults singing together in one work. A favourite with the children was the 16th Century song, Gaudete, which for many of the older choir members brought back memories of the folk group Steeleye Span who made this song popular in the 1970s. One of the songs, I Saw Three Ships included the children clapping and whistling, which they did in perfect time, no mean feat. The final song was a Wassail medley which according to the musical score should be sung 'joyful and rollicking' and the choirs rose to the occasion.

To round off the evening everyone joined in the final carol O come all ye faithful.

Preparation and rehearsal were key to the success on Saturday. Co-ordinated by chorale member Katrina O'Neill the children, some as young as 7 years were trained by their teachers in their schools and only came together as one big choir for rehearsal on the afternoon before the concert on the day. It is a credit to their teachers, Michelle Woodward of Swiss Gardens, Claire Cossins of Chesswood School and Fiona Whittaker of Goring C of E School, that each school choir was fully prepared. In the week leading up to the concert each school was visited by the Musical Director, George Jones. As teacher Michelle Woodward explained, 'Although it's hard work, I look forward to it because it's a fantastic opportunity for the children. And the parents are very supportive' Thanks go to Patcham Silver Band and their conductor, James Benka-Coker, George Jones, Musical Director of Angmering Chorale for his inimitable musical leadership and to accompanist Alison Manton for her incredible skill and dexterity. Children, parents, family, friends, choirs and a band and singing and playing together with great gusto surely that must have had a good effect on mental well-being? As one parent explained 'isn't it great to have a good old sing, it reminded me of when I was a child at Christmas'.

Angmering Chorale will be at Arundel Cathedral on 28th March 2020 for the first concert in their Festival of British Composers series.

Diane Kearsley December 2019