

## Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten – Monday 20 July 2009

Performance full of verve and wit  
The Bach Choir sang in the Frauenkirche

When the important London Bach Choir performed “The Seasons” on Saturday for the Haydn Year, it did not only recall the links between Great Britain and the continent, but also the choice of Bach as the choir’s name in 1876 was no coincidence, for its first choirmaster, Otto Goldschmidt, had been a pupil of Mendelssohn in Leipzig and was one of the founders of the cultivation of the British interest in Bach. Thus several circles of interest came together at this guest performance in Dresden.

The choir had on several occasions performed with the Dresden Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, which, as this is the holiday period, filled a few positions with guest players. However, after the cancelled concert by the Elbe, the Philharmonic marked the end of its season with a performance which was both dignified and musically strong. The conductor, David Hill, who conducted the choir and orchestra together from the harpsichord, could rely completely on the ensembles and thereby performed the substantial oratorio with considerable wit.

It was remarkable how naturally Hill combined expert knowledge with historical performance practice, scenic effects, and also symphonic strength. There was no rigid stylistic arrangement; first and foremost was the effective interpretation of the text, the colourful and tasteful transposition of the onomatopoeia in Haydn’s “The Seasons”. The conductor abstained from bold exaggerations, but some slightly stronger accents could, however, have helped to get more contrasts in the distinctly friendly feel of the colossal work. Hill put the emphasis clearly on the ‘singability’ (*Singbarkeit*) of the text, and for this he worked with great versatility with the tempi, which he liked to take faster in the instrumental passages, but came back to the original tempo in the large choir sections. The result enabled the audience to have a better understanding of the work. The choice of the English version was natural for the choir, and without a doubt enriching for a performance in Dresden.

The Bach Choir was impressive because of its effortless flexibility and immense dynamics. The energy of the choir lasted right until the wonderfully thunderous final chorus even though during the concert a slight deterioration of the voices had become noticeable. This slight clouding was, however, the only time where one could notice that this choir is actually an amateur choir. From ethereal strings to clear, robust ‘Tutto’, the Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra’s performance was rich in nuances, and uncertainties remained minimal and inconspicuous.

The trio of soloists wittily picked up on Hill’s lively interpretation: David Wilson-Johnson (bass) humorously yet seriously in the questions in “Winter”, Timothy Robinson (tenor) with delicate, lyrical shaping, playfully switching from singing a song to acting a part. Vocally and artistically outstanding was the soprano Sarah Fox, who sang effervescently and without any trace of exertion. All in all, the performance poured out like a unified whole. There was a short easing of the tension in “Summer” which was offset by David Hill in the next two sections, and this ensured that ‘The Seasons’ was brought to a highly enjoyable conclusion.

*Hartmut Schütz*

Translation by Sarah Hole