

Voices of Exmoor – A Christmas Concert

15 December 2018

A Review by Richard Westcott

Up and down the country, many a community choir will be presenting a selection of Songs and Carols this Christmas. There'll be quite a few (perhaps too many) old favourites, a certain amount of the applause will be polite rather than genuinely enthusiastic and, sadly but inevitably, several offerings will – how can one put it? – not make the listener feel relaxed.

Absolutely none of which applied to this performance.

To start with, the programme was full of surprises. Yes, we had one or two of the traditionals – this was a carol concert after all – but even these came in fresh garb, such as a Latin American We Wish You a Happy Christmas and an unusual Jingle Bells, in both of which considerable choral challenges were well surmounted.

This is a choir not frightened to tackle some potentially difficult part-singing. The Carol of the Bells was convincingly delivered, as was Gardner's complex Holly and Ivy.

In all this, they were superbly accompanied. Joke Routledge was as at home in Scott Joplin mode as in the Snowman. Voices of Exmoor are fortunate indeed to enjoy such support. An excellent partnership with the Musical Director was immediately evident.

With a clear beat, obvious ability to motivate and inspire, and attention to detail, Amanda Taylor showed herself to be no less than a natural choral conductor. I was impressed by the good diction, wide dynamic range and crisp entries and finishes.

But perhaps most striking of all was the vigour and enthusiasm. An audience loves nothing more than seeing a choir enjoying their singing – as much as a choir loves nothing more than delighting their listeners. Under this conductor, this vital virtuous circle was there, casting its magic.

Well placed in the programme, and nicely chosen, were the solos. Varying from the intimate Someday at Christmas to the rumbustious Thank You Very Much, from the world of pop to J S Bach, they were all skilfully sung and gave much pleasure. The spirited applause – completely natural – abundantly proved this.

So, demonstrating their ability to range from quietly lyrical solos through duets to well-disciplined close harmony, to exuberant raise-the-roof choral singing, Voices of Exmoor have proved that they are a community choir with a difference. Here's a choir unafraid to take risks, to present every form of choral music and even stretch their audiences – but above all, to enjoy themselves and give pleasure.

That is really what it's all about.

Sing on, V of E!