

Voices of Exmoor and Friends - Pimm's and Performance
Saturday 18th July 2026

Although normally a choir member, I spent the evening of the "Voices of Exmoor and Friends - Pimm's and Performance" concert as part of the audience, being *hors de combat* and unable to sing. I admit to a sadness at not being up with the team, having rehearsed until the eleventh hour, but found the evening really enjoyable and instructive.

The Front of House team did, as always, a wonderful job; a welcoming ticketing desk ran like clockwork and the venue was laid out neatly and attractively. The audience was admitted, seated, fuelled by Pimm's from the bar, and the hall soon hummed with an air of anticipation.

The choir gave a good first impression: all seated, relaxed and chatting *sotto voce*, ready for the arrival of the musical director, Amanda Taylor, and the accompanist, Joke Routledge. They all looked resplendent in the "black with bling" dress code - top-to-toe black for all, with a subtle touch of colour from the gentlemen's bow ties - and the ladies neatly coiffed with discreet make-up and sparkle.

This season, Amanda and Joke (at risk of their sanity), as well as working hard to present a varied programme, had given focus to the choir's presentation, stressing technique, professionalism, image and demeanour and, in short, the choir peaked. They sat neatly, rising and sitting on cue, the black music folder drill perfected to rival the best of regiments.

Standing correctly, nearly all eyes on Amanda, the concert began with Gilbert and Sullivan's rousing "The Cachucha", a tongue twister of a song, but fun to sing after mastering the "clitter clatters" and "pitter patters". I thought the choir was a little diffident at first. There have been a number of new members this spring - for many their first public performance - and some with experience, but out of practice. However, they soon relaxed into their stride.

The first half of the concert was filled with an interesting mixture of musical styles, from the beautifully-sung harmonies of "The Seal Lullaby" to more modern songs, such as "Why Do Fools Fall In Love?" and "Can't Take My Eyes Off Of You," which the ladies had been told to "sing sexy."

"You're Just In Love" was a lively rendition of the popular song from Irving Berlin's show "Call Me Madam." This song has two equal and contrasting melodies running at the same time, both with independent lyrics, making it an ideal opportunity for audience participation. It is fair to say that the gentlemen of the audience outdid the ladies; perhaps some potential new recruits in the future?

Another popular show song was "Who Will Buy?" from *Oliver!*, in which the choir was complemented by the flute played by Hayley Hodges. This is a complicated piece that involves the interjection of the voices echoing different street-sellers beginning their day's work. The choir were attentive to Amanda's clear direction and sang with confidence and clarity.

The first half concluded with "A Flower Remembered," a beautiful song written to commemorate the Japanese earthquake and tsunami of 2011. This was sung to perfection and the addition of Bernie Bettinson's atmospheric cornet-playing made this an emotional and thought-provoking end to the first half.

More Pimm's flowed during the interval, contributing to a warm and convivial atmosphere amongst the audience. By this point, choir confidence was in abundance and the second half, starting with "Memory" from the musical *Cats*, was delivered in style.

For this concert, Amanda had the inspirational idea to complement the singing with the "Voices of Exmoor String Quartet" - four elegant ladies with amazing skill who played beautifully. Amanda had arranged some of the music especially to include the quartet: "Somewhere Only We Know" was performed by all with great feeling and precision and "Benedictus," sung from memory, was accompanied by a haunting solo cello melody gradually joined by strings, cornet and flute. It was evident that many of the audience were incredibly moved by both the lyrics and spine-tingling harmonies of both of these pieces. Indeed, some members of the audience were even moved to tears.

The tenors and basses, always good for a comic turn, and well-coached by Roger Martin, entertained us with "The Hippopotamus Song" and, again, the audience were encouraged to join in, all gloriously revelling in the mud!

The choir's chosen charity this year is "Exmoor Search and Rescue" and the choir Chair, Mary Le Coyte, gave a short, informative and well-received talk about its work. Donations from the concert will be given to this charity.

A fun arrangement of Lennon and McCartney's "Penny Lane" and a marathon Rodgers and Hammerstein medley, in which all the musicians joined the choir to sing, concluded the concert. Rapturous applause, a closing speech from the musical director, thank yous and gifts for the guest musicians concluded the evening.

There was the occasional slip, but this was barely noticeable and nothing detracted from the wonderful, energetic performance and obvious commitment of everyone - Amanda, Joke, the choir members and guest musicians. It was obvious to the audience that the members of the choir were thoroughly enjoying themselves, whilst maintaining focus, their trademark attention to diction and a growing air of professionalism. The programme was varied and well-chosen, interspersed with appropriately informative and humorous introductions from both Amanda and other members of the choir, and the inclusion of the musicians proved that Voices of Exmoor are continuing to strive for new and innovative ways to keep the community (and themselves) entertained.

I thought this concert was one of Voices of Exmoor's best and massive credit must go to the musical director, accompanist and members of the committee who worked tirelessly to put it together, not to mention the singers who work hard every week to improve upon every performance. Well done to all concerned for such an enjoyable evening and roll on Christmas!!

CM