
Sounds of Africa

AFRICAN SANCTUS Newbury Choral Society at the Corn Exchange

THE Corn Exchange has hosted several unusual and successful concerts recently, and African Sanctus was another 'hit'.

Conductor Robert Barsby bravely plunged in head first (headphones and all) with an energetic enthusiasm and skill that, dare I say, is rarely seen on the political front these days! Newbury Choral Society had been thoroughly taught their notes and rhythms and gave of their very best; soprano Eileen Pinkarchevsky was superb, her clear jazz/classical voice and interpretation proving her conviction for the work and its aims, and the Wessex Percussion Ensemble with some very young, exceedingly competent players aroused the audience to join in with whatever physical participatory movements seemed appropriate. It had to be that way, it was that sort of music! The overall achievement was magnificent, Robert Barsby holding all forces, including the pre-recorded African music, tautly and excitingly together.

The first half of the evening consisted of a short talk by the composer David Fanshawe, who introduced the audience to the source material for the different movements in his inimitable way, complete with fly whisk and 'spiritual' cap. Although a fascinating intro-

duction to different sounds and different aspects of musical life, it was not really necessary and appeared to be a half-hour of egocentric self-promotion.

David Fanshawe himself stated that "African Sanctus is not a classical work, it is A THING". One must ask, what sort of thing and for what purpose? As an attempt to educate and create awareness for the world around us, it is an outstanding 'thing'. As an aural travel documentary it probably does not have a rival. But its position as a musical work is questionable.

But the evening was so enjoyable. Colourful (everyone dressed in dark skirts/trousers and brightly coloured shirts, with a screened backdrop and effective lighting) and powerful, the different aural African images surely arousing thought and conscience. Despite the various emotions of African life portrayed, the overall feeling was happy and sunny, and fun!

David Fanshawe's skill in proving that music is an international language is unique, demonstrating how African melody can lead naturally into our western scales and musical structures, and can be heard together, uniting to make 'world music'.

JULIA ROWNTREE