

# Choralists dig deep to deliver

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Conductor works Newbury Choral Society hard in challenging Tippett oratorio

**NEWBURY Choral Society chose a difficult programme for their summer concert at Douai this year with the main work being Tippett's rather sprawling *A Child Of Our Time*, written in 1939/41 to address the horrors of Nazi suppression of Jewish people in Poland and Germany.**

The first half of this ambitious programme was given to Richard Strauss' moving *Four Last Songs*, with soprano Elizabeth Atherton in commanding form as the soloist and sturdy, warm playing by the London Concertante, conducted vigorously by Leo Hussain.

Strauss' songs, written at the very end of his life, set a mood of sombre tranquility that was very well translated by the orchestra under Hussain's guiding direction.

The music flows along gently with

## Choral

Newbury Choral Society, at Douai Abbey, on Saturday, June 24

a thread of melancholy piercing the strong melodic line and the blending of Atherton's wide ranging, clarion-clear soprano with the strings and

Elizabeth Atherton excelled in the soprano solos, Matthew Beale's tenor was crisp and penetrating and Hussain coaxed a bright, dramatic performance from the chorus and orchestra

horns was beautifully balanced.

At one point her powerful voice rose majestically to hit the high notes and then descended, to dovetail delightfully with the French horn obligato.

Simplicity of line is a key factor in the impact this music produces and this was a very strong performance.

Following such a recital is difficult and the Tippett work is dark and often brooding, changes of mood and dynamics sometimes almost brutal in their impact.

Part two contrasts gentle melodies with thunderous explosions from the orchestra and chorus. I wonder really if Newbury Choral Society chose wisely with this composition, as the focus of attention is almost always on the orchestra and soloists.

Once again Elizabeth Atherton

excelled in the soprano solos, Matthew Beale's tenor was crisp and penetrating and Hussain coaxed a bright, dramatic performance from the chorus and orchestra.

Robert Rice handled the bass parts adequately and Pippa Longworth, deputising for Clarissa Meek, sang well but lacked a little in projection during the louder passages.

When part three is reached, an air of lyrical gentleness follows a forceful introduction and signals the hope of reconciliation after the dark days of war and Nazi atrocities.

It was a stirring performance overall with the choir working hard and the orchestra in great form.

If there seemed to be a sense of anti-climax, it was doubtless due to the sublime reading of the Strauss songs in the first half.

**DEREK ANSELL**