

event

St Cecilia concert review

John Manning reviews the St Cecilia Festival Society concert at St Albans Cathedral.

Combining a group of amateur choirs for a one-off performance can produce something of a nightmare – but this year's presentation by the St Albans St Cecilia Festival Society was a triumph on several levels.

Not only did it combine members of Harpenden's Hardyng Choir, the Radlett Choral Society and the St Albans Chamber Choir, together with London-based chamber choir Vivamus and the St Albans Symphony Orchestra, but it also used a huge choir of primary school children from across the county.

The concert in a packed St Albans Cathedral on Saturday opened with Benjamin Britten's *Fanfare for St Edmundsbury* followed by *Three Seaside Postcards* by outstanding English composer Jonathan Dove, which conductor Rufus Frowde interspersed with *Dawn* and *Sunday Morning*, two of Britten's stunning *Sea Interludes* from his opera *Peter Grimes*.

Dove's *Three Seaside Postcards* were written for young singers and full symphony and, although complex, they are a complete delight.

Rufus Frowde deserves great praise for his work in training the young singers for this truly memorable performance and equally the young singers should be congratulated for their remarkable performance.

The main work of the evening was Ralph Vaughan Williams' epic *Sea Symphony*, a performance which just happened to fall on the 147th anniversary of the composer's birth.

It uses works of the great American poet Walt Whitman for the symphony and by chance its first performance was also on October 12.

Scored for a large choir, symphony orchestra and soprano and baritone soloists, the work is huge and complex, with the choir in a dominant role throughout.

Although not perfect, the mass choir's performance was remarkable and a great achievement for all concerned.

And the orchestra truly excelled with some really fine playing by individual members.

Equally soloists, soprano Charlotte-Anne Shipley and baritone Morgan Pearse gave tremendous performances which added greatly to the overall splendour of the performance.