

Thursday, 4 October 2018

REVIEW: Singknaben Der St. Ursenkathedrale, Solothurn - The Cathedral, Manchester.



The Boys' Choir of St. Ursen Cathedral in Solothurn, Switzerland payed a visit to Manchester this afternoon as part of a whistle-stop short tour which saw the entire choir, which must have ranged in age from perhaps about 8 years old to mid-twenties, come together to sing a repertoire of songs both sacred and profane spanning the centuries in a wonderful hour long, and well rehearsed concert.

In short, the concert was a delight! Having travelled all the way from the German-speaking part of Switzerland to perform 6 concerts in 5 days in 4 cities, it was little wonder that the youngest boys on the front row were showing signs of fatigue! but this didn't stop the enjoyment of their singing. A well designed repertoire from Purcell to contemporary, with pretty much everything in between, with some jazzy and snazzy choreography and sound effects for the more modern pieces too!

The choir's roots are ancient and traditional, dating back to the cathedral's establishment in 742AD. The present Director of the choir, Andreas Reize was himself one of the choristers too, and has a long and happy relationship with them. This afternoon Reize held a firm and controlled grip of the choir as they occasionally had to re-position for certain songs, and his conducting was always clear and precise.

The one thing to impress me more than anything this afternoon though was certainly the fact that both the vast majority of the repertoire was sung from memory and the entire concert was sung a cappella. - this means unaccompanied, with Reize giving only the starting note for each piece. For such an age these choristers were singing music which was both exceedingly technically difficult, with complicated rhythms and harmonies in many differing styles and genres, and not only all that but in several different languages too! [and for the Swiss people - singing in 'Hoch Deutsch' could also be classed as a foreign language too!]' It really was quite astounding.

My favourite pieces came towards the end of the concert when the choir moved away from the traditional religious fayre and starting bopping, clapping, whooping, and swaying to Latin American rhythms, jazz-infused performance novelties, and a fabulous narrative tale about witches and wizards and sung in the Basque language!

Ausgezeichnet! Thank you so much for coming to Manchester and I hope to see / hear you again sometime soon!

Reviewer - Matthew Dougall
on - 3/10/18