

TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION, SUNG WITH PASSION

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Bach's St John Passion, Carlisle Cathedral The Palm Sunday performance was a truly thrilling account of this great work – a dramatic setting of words from St John's Gospel, telling of Christ's trial and crucifixion.

Jeremy Suter, master of music at the cathedral, directed the combined forces of Carlisle's Abbey Singers, the visiting Gabrieli choir from Budapest, the cathedral choristers and youth choir, a fine team of soloists and the Northern Chamber Orchestra, with Edward Taylor, organ.

In unifying this large number of performers, Jeremy's firm direction and judgement of tempi was exemplary and we were assured of a performance of a very high standard.

The task of the Evangelist, sung by Stephen Brown, is to narrate events and his clear, ringing baritone voice responded to every nuance of the text.

Paul im Thurn delivered the words of Christ with quiet dignity, contrasting with the authority of Geoffrey Gray's vibrant bass in the role of Pilate.

Susan Jordan and Peter Bowyer were reliable in their minor roles as the maid and the servant.

The chorales were a notable feature of the performance, with their wonderful harmonic changes and contrapuntal effects.

Here the fresh voices of the choristers and youth choir added extra vibrancy and impact and each chorale had its own momentum and character.

The choruses depicting the mob who demand the death of Jesus were sung with savage intensity, supported by equally incisive playing by the talented Northern Chamber Orchestra.

In Bach's Passions, the solo arias contemplate and comment on the events taking place. Soprano Lisa Swayne's voice is strong and clear, with fine diction, and her expressive final aria was beautifully matched by gently sobbing woodwind and continuo.

Stephen Brown, in addition to his tour de force as the Evangelist, sang the tenor arias with enviable ease.

Cathedral lay clerk Adam Crewe's light and flexible alto voice came into its own in his second aria, accompanied by organ and cello playing of authentic style.

Jonathon Millican is an elegant singer with a refined tone, and his bass arias

were particularly pleasing, especially that which followed the death of Jesus, accompanied by a hushed and beautifully sung chorale.

The final chorus, a prayer that Christ may rest after his suffering and that Christian souls will see him again in Heaven, closed an evening of intense emotion and drama, convincingly conveyed by Jeremy Suter et al, who richly deserved our gratitude and praise.

EJ LAMB