

Expressive and colourful concert

IF MUSIC is about communication, then the Orpheus Singers' concert, *The Grand Romantics*, on Saturday at St Catherine's Church, Ventnor, was a winner.

The choir was in excellent form and displayed sound musical control under the baton of conductor Philip Fryer.

It was exciting to see the communication between the conductor and the choir, which often produced a result greater than the component parts. The concert was expressive, varied and colourful, and much enjoyed by the capacity audience.

The programme began with two unaccompanied pieces by Bruckner: *Os Justi* (*The Mouth of the Righteous utters Wisdom*), a contemplative piece of deceptive simplicity, and *Ave Maria* (*Hail, Mary*), a richly textured and varied salutation requiring a high level of vocal control to realise the composer's intent.

The Bruckner pieces could have benefited from a more resonant acoustic to bring out the textures and dynamics of the music but the choir was undaunted by this and it demonstrated well the intricacies of the works.

Next we were treated to a Schubert piece, *Gott ist mein Hirt* (*God is my Shepherd*), a setting of Psalm 23, performed by the women, sung with conviction and with some delightful moments, though intonation was at



Soprano soloist Kelly Wavell.

Pictures by PAUL JENNINGS

times a little suspect.

Two secular pieces were sung by the men: *Der Jäger Abscheid* (*The Hunter's Farewell*) and an arrangement of *Gaudeamus Igitur* (*So Let us Rejoice*) by Brahms. The men sang these pieces with a rare combination of gusto and sensitivity.

A high point of the first half were two religious pieces by Mendelssohn, each with a featured solo: *Ave Maria*,

with a tenor solo by Mitch Jones with a rich and bold interpretation soaring above the choir; and *Hear my Prayer/O for the Wings of a Dove*, with a beautiful and sensitive soprano solo by Kelly Wavell, who produced some effortless phrasing and clarity of tone.

The second half featured the wonderful *Liebeslieder Walzer* (*Love Song Waltzes*) by Brahms, a secular song-cycle featuring 18 separate love songs on a pastoral theme.

The song cycle is rich and varied, and features changes in force from full choir to sectional arrangements and a charming solo, *Wohl schön bewandt war es* (*I Was Fair and Contented with my Life*), was sung by Kathy Howells with delicacy and feeling.

It was a pleasure to hear the four-handed piano accompaniment by Michele Brock and Merryl Spong, who played excellently and sensitively together.

The programme closed appropriately with Josef Rheinberger's *Abendlied* (*Evening Song*), set for seven-part unaccompanied choir, which rounded off the whole evening perfectly.

HANNAH LARKIN



Accompanist Merryl Spong, conductor Philip Fryer and accompanist Michele Brock take a bow.

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