

Review: Shining Light
Venue: Old St John's, Nelson
Date: Sunday 26 January 2.00pm
Reviewed by: Adrienne Matthews

The Nelson Summer School Choir, initiated in 2001 by Carl Browning, brings choristers from all around NZ to participate in a ten day workshop, culminating in performances that showcase the results achieved. This year, according to Browning, was the "best ever" and I heartily agree.

Some prospective concert goers may have been put off by the program which featured entirely works of the twentieth century excepting Eric Whitacre's "Alleluia"(2011). After all, we are used to much of twentieth century music having a degree of dissonance. These pieces however were a complete surprise with their beautiful melodies and rich harmonic layers.

A great conductor cannot be judged on the sound his choir makes at full voice but rather, at pianissimo. Ebbe Munk of Denmark, showed beyond doubt, complete mastery of his craft, coaxing the most perfect soft tones from the seventy one singers whenever required.

Elgar's "Great is the Lord" with lovely organ accompaniment by Jonathan Berkhan, was followed by Morten Lauridsen's "O Magnum Mysterium" (1994), an outstanding work from someone who began his working life as a forest service firefighter and is now the most widely performed American choral composer.

His arrangements of two songs on American poems, "Prayer" and "Sure On This Shining Night", were a chance for soloist baritone Robert Tucker to display his rich, honeyed tones that gave complete respect to these songs. He was accompanied by Berkhan with a heartfelt accompaniment on the piano.

Lauridsen's "Lux Aeterna" (1997), meaning "eternal light" is essentially a song cycle Lauridsen described this as " an intimate work of quiet serenity centred around a universal symbol of hope, reassurance, goodness and illumination at all levels" and it is these symbols that formed the basis of the whole concert.

Singers Olivia Sheat received a scholarship and Angela Wratt, sponsorship, which brought this mesmerising, "food for the soul", performance to its close.