



The Vivace Chorus.

The Vivace singers show their versatile talents

A venture to thrill the heart of this ex-opera singer took place last night at G Live.

Guildford's new concert venue hosted the Vivace Chorus in an exciting programme of operatic favourites old and new.

We are used to the serious side of this choir in the soaring space of Guildford Cathedral, even the plush grandeur of the Royal Albert Hall, but tonight we saw Vivace in a new light.

Singing one or two works chosen to complement each other in a programme is one thing, but dipping a toe into so many, and varied, styles of opera, not an oratorio in sight, is not a venture for the faint hearted!

The Brandenburg Sinfonia opened the programme with a lively performance of the overture from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and then the stage quickly filled with townsfolk eager to welcome the picadors and toreadors in the *March of the Toreadors* from Bizet's *Carmen*.

With such a large chorus, moving on and off the stage might require firmer choreography in future, but the singing was full of vitality and the difficult choral entries in this Bizet chorus were precisely executed.

As number after number went by, the choir showed mastery of French, German, Italian and Russian, not just the language but the styles too.

The broad sweeps of sound in the choruses from *Die Meistersinger* and *Boris Godunov* were a joy, though the *Slave's chorus* from *Nabucco* might have benefited from a slightly slower tempo to enable the string sextuplets to be heard and a greater sense of yearning to come through.

Only in the *Easter Hymn* did the

musical entries get behind as the choir moved onstage already singing, but it happens at Covent Garden too.

The Triumphal scene from Verdi's *Aida* encapsulated all the strengths of this excellent choir; beautiful piano singing, especially in the section for ladies only; full rich forte sections, and excellent entries. Thanks too to the wonderful trumpets. All the soloists deserve mention. Sara Lian Owen has a soprano voice which showed itself capable of singing with the colour necessary for Dido's *Lament* but also able to spin out the limpid lines of Rusalka's *Song to the Moon*. However it was in the Puccini arias that it found its home.

Thomas Faulkner's bass had all the Russian darkness necessary for Boris and I expect to hear more of him in the future. Gareth Brynmor John has a baritone voice of beauty and flexibility and sang with ease and control; another voice to look out for in future.

The tenor, Philip Modeno, brought us all the opera 'pops' and, except for a slightly hard edge to the tone in the *Boheme* aria, sang with all the full and ringing tone one has come to expect when hearing these well loved numbers. Special praise for *Nessun Dorma* just imagine singing that straight after the *Brindisi*.

The orchestra in full flight sometimes overpowered the singers, but this is an accomplished group, as it showed in its sparkling performance of the *Polovtsian Dances*. This was an encore to be proud of, and a definite 'party piece' for Vivace.

Thanks to Jeremy Backhouse for conducting throughout with verve and commitment.

Gillian Ramsden