

2 February 2007

It's always a pleasure to attend an event put on to raise money for charity. Last Saturday's performance of *The Creation* was just such an occasion, held in support of the pioneering charity The Art Room, which aims to build the confidence of so-called 'difficult' children through a variety of creative projects.

Samples of art work produced by the children were on display, reinforcing just how worthy a cause this is. As broadcaster Jon Snow pointed out in the programme, it was particularly apt that such a creative enterprise should be supported by a performance of *The Creation*.

And what a glorious performance it was. Everybody - performers and audience - seemed in particularly buoyant mood, and there was an almost tangible atmosphere of good-humoured enjoyment.

Among the trio of soloists, I was most impressed with tenor Patrick Ashcroft, who stepped in at short notice to replace an indisposed Mark Chaundy, and sang with great panache, reinforcing the celebratory message of this sublime work. Soprano Lianne-Marie Skrinjar gave a compelling performance, her voice pure, controlled and fluid. I just felt she needed to relax a little; her deep intensity was in stark contrast to Ashcroft's general air of affability. Bass Aidan Smith, too, could have allowed the occasional smile to cross his face, but he sang creditably enough, revealing a strong voice and sound technique.

But the greatest praise, perhaps, must go to the choir; a 'scratch' ensemble of gallant souls who rallied enthusiastically to the cause and, after only one rehearsal, produced a sound that was bright, joyous and thoroughly infectious. Haydn penned some particularly wonderful choruses in *The Creation*, and the singers here were clearly relishing every moment.

Underpinning it all was a confident and meticulous contribution from the Oxford Sinfonia, with conductor Robert Dean in masterful control.

Next year's concert will be Verdi's *Requiem*.

For more information, contact The Art Room at Oxford Community School, Glanville Road, Oxford OX4 2AU.

Nicola Lisle, *The Oxford Times*