

**Music from Venice and the Mediterranean**  
June 10th 2017 at Portishead Methodist Church

It might have been a damp evening outside, but in the Portishead Methodist Church we were about to be transported to Venice and the Mediterranean. *Portishead Choral Society*, and their director and conductor Jonathan Palmer, together with the *Bristol Brass Consort* took us on a musical journey from Venice through Italy, Greece, France and Spain, juxtaposing Early Baroque with light modern music.

The first piece was the magnificent and uplifting opening to Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610, a stirring fanfare for choir and brass which really got the concert going. It was written for the wide open spaces of St Marks, Venice and although the Methodist Church is slightly smaller than St Marks, Jonathan made clever use of the gallery in this and subsequent pieces to place singers and musicians both in front of and behind the audience. A real coup de theatre!

The next piece, Gabrieli's 'O Magnum Mysterium', was slower, and beautifully expressed by the full choir split into high and low voices, accompanied by the brass. Then there were two brass works: first, 'Echo Fantasia' by Banchieri, again using the gallery with half the brass before the audience and the other half behind us to produce a wonderful echo effect, and then 'La Spiritata' by Gabrieli

Then followed Gabrieli's 'In Ecclesiis', with the full choir, four soloists and brass, and the first half ended with a beautiful performance of a German cantata 'Freue dich des Weibes deiner Jugend' by Schutz (who had studied in Venice).

The second half moved from the religious to the profane, with pieces the programme described as being 'already in your subconscious' and, as is usually the way with Portishead Choral Society's concerts, there was room for audience participation. The 'Soldier's Chorus' from Gounod's Faust was fiery and rousing, and difficult not to hum along to. A lovely rendition of 'La Mer' by Charles Trenet had a whole verse for the audience to sing, and before 'Never on a Sunday', percussion instruments were handed out to the audience; I shook my maracas with the best of them. All these songs were ably accompanied by Richard Lennox.

The finale was a rousing 'Funiculi, Funicula' with the audience joining with the choir in a mighty cheer at the end. And a great time was had by all.

**Dr Peter Godfrey (11<sup>th</sup> June 2017)**