

ARUN CHORAL SOCIETY
Standing Ovation for new work
Saturday 5th November 2006 ARUNDEL CATHEDRAL

The Arun Choral Society's enterprise in programming the UK Premiere of Jil Bartley's '*Requiem*' with two Elgar works - '*Sospiri*' and his cantata '*The Spirit of England*' was rewarded by a full house.

Elgar's setting of the war poems of Lawrence Binyon in '*The Spirit of England*' is one of his less popular works - there is *nobilmente*, but few popular tunes! . This performance fully captured the elusive note of restraint which characterises this work, Jon English (Tenor) was the effective soloist.

The choir revelled in the luscious romanticism of Jil Bartley's rather saccharine '*Requiem*'. Throughout the evening the balance between choir and orchestra was good, helped perhaps by the new staging. The choir produced a good full-bodied tone throughout the concert, worked hard at their diction and, in the '*Requiem*', there were magnificent climaxes and attack in the *Dies Irae*, which contrasted well with the effective soft singing in the haunting *Pie Jesu*. The excellent soloists, who represented the angels of the new and old orders in the passing of time, were Stephanie Varnerin (Soprano) and Emily Bauer – Jones (Contralto).

The performance ended in theatrical fashion with the two soloists bearing candles chanting as they processed down the darkened nave into the distance. The audience rose to give the performers a standing ovation. Jil Bartley should have been well pleased by this performance which, under John Henvilles's capable direction, was both effective and affectionate. The Sinfonia of Arun gave good support. One hopes that one day this forward looking choir will be heard at the heart of a revitalised Arundel Festival.

Tim Bastow