

Bromsgrove Arts News, March 2014
by Jim Page

Stunning Concert at St John's

The Orchestra of St John produced another stunning concert on 1st March when a large audience enjoyed music making of a high standard. The concert opened with Vaughan Williams 'Fantasia on a Theme of Tallis' and, for the first time in my experience, we were able to hear the theme on which the piece is based sung by the choir at the back of the church - a most effective introduction to the VW piece that, with the solo quartet placed by the altar, duly made an unusually strong stereophonic impact in the resonant acoustic of the Parish Church. Britten's Serenade for tenor, horn and strings contains all the facets of his genius in miniature form and with Tim Stidwill's bravura playing and such a lyrical tenor as Gwilym Bowen relishing the evocative poetry a marvellous performance resulted.

After the interval a good-sized choir joined the orchestra for a performance of Haydn's 'Nelson' Mass, a work full of trumpet and drum fanfares included as a celebration Nelson's victory at Aboukir Bay. Conductor Richard Jenkinson captured the varied moods in this striking piece with consummate skill: cheerfulness for the Benedicite, reckless verve in the Et Resurrexit, devotional tones in the Sanctus and deftness in the accompaniment to the soaring roulades of soloist Claire Prewer. The other soloists (Lara Bienkowska, Gwilym Bowen and Mark Ashmore) completed a good team and, although the positioning of the choir in the transept will always make it difficult for them to make full impact, their singing came over well and was certainly spirited.