

## **SCO Chorus Christmas Concert**

Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh



You can tell the festive season has arrived when the SCO Chorus's Christmas Concert comes around, my neighbour in Greyfriars Kirk told me. It's true that the annual event has in just a few years, become a firm, much-anticipated fixture in Edinburgh's concert calendar and draws a capacity – and gratifyingly mixed – crowd.

This year's offering felt more traditional than previous occasions, with music themed around the Virgin Mary, and seasonal readings from poetry and journals – dispatched with charm and character by Rebecca Wilkie – both making nods to the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. Full marks to conductor Ben Parry for weighting his programme towards women composers down the ages, from medieval Hildegard of Bingen, whose brief plainchant *Hodie aperuit* the singers delivered as they processed on stage, to contem-

porary British composer Kerry Andrew, whose florid *Hevene Quene* closed the first half.

The chorus occasionally sounded a little thin in the exposed lines of Tallis's *Missa Puer natus est nobis*, which provided the concert's framework, despite a ringing richness and brilliant clarity elsewhere, and Parry pushed through certain pieces at a rather brisk tempo – good for drama, less so for contemplation – though his phrasing and balance were extraordinary.

The evening's high points, however, were its two closing numbers, for which the singers moved from the stage to form a circle surrounding the audience: Sally Beamish's caressing, heartfelt *In the Stillness* and Swedish composer Jan Sandström's remarkable setting of Praetorius's *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*, its familiar melody held aloft in a glistening halo of harmonies, both delivered with thoughtful tenderness. Extraordinary stuff.

**DAVID KETTLE**