

Concert Review from Wolfenbuetteler Zeitung, by Rainer Sliepen, translated by Christopher Heaven.

Heartfelt and bright from the British Isles.

The English choir of St Michael and All Angels are guests in the church in Gross Denkte.

“Very British”, that’s how the little church in Gross Denkte looked to its visitors on Friday evening. The guests were the English choir of St Michael and All Angels from Exeter in the county of Devon in South-west England.

The group of around twenty singers (aged between 18 and 65) had not only brought along English choral music spanning six centuries but also something scrumptious for “tea time” - typically English buttered scones and, the speciality of the Devon region, the “cream tea”.

Charmingly presented by their director of music, Erika Borley, and Sabrina Groeschel, herself born in Wolfenbuettel and a minister, the audience came to know about the inner feeling and exuberance of the sacred music of the British Isles.

To begin with, Alex West, who conducted the choir in the first part of the concert, played an organ introit by Samuel Wesley (1810-1876). Bright with a brisk tempo, festive, ceremonious and cheerful with dramatic decoration modulating in a lively fashion throughout the entire dynamic range.

Next on offer were peaceful chants such as a setting of Psalm 119 “Beati quorum via” by the Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924); a typical example of English romantic music, its distinguishing features being flowing melodies with smoothly floating harmony – and such was the music in Denkte.

There were still no powerful contrasts; these were to be predominant in the performances after the interval. Instead the English singers proved their ability in sung renderings of biblical verses.

The choir rehearses once a week for services. Choral scholars help to ensure quality which allows demanding pieces such as the Magnificat by Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623) and “If ye love me” by Thomas Tallis (1505-1585), both full of intensity and assurance of faith, to be tackled and performed with feeling.

In the second half of the concert we heard tender polyphony with graceful upper voice solos in direct contrast with the powerful full choir.

“Blessed be the God and Father” again by Wesley is an impressive monument of a splendidly extrovert profession of faith. The organ roars and the singing blossoms into the most beautiful colours and then suddenly all quietly come brilliantly tender solos.

There followed much applause from an impressed audience for an artistic performance and an engaging presentation.