

ARTS

A Coronation concert to remember

The Jersey Chamber Orchestra, along with the Jersey Festival Choir and guest soloists, performed to a standing ovation at St Helier Methodist Centre recently as part of the Liberation International Music Festival. **Mark Tarik** was there



■ Chen Reiss, Lawrence Zazzo, Mark Dobell and Jonathan Brown singing Mozart's Coronation Mass

THE Jersey Chamber Orchestra, under the direction of Eamonn Dougan, delivered an extraordinary performance that was nothing short of magical for their recent Coronation Concert.

The programme was a delightful mix of Handel, Haydn and Mozart, showcasing the immense talent of both the orchestra and the soloists and finished with a standing ovation.

The concert opened with Handel's *Zadok the Priest*, and from the very first notes, the orchestra transported the audience to a world of regal elegance and grandeur. The precision and unity of the musicians were truly impressive, and Mr Dougan's expert conducting allowed the music to flow effortlessly.

Many in the audience commented on the 'wow' factor of the Festival Choir's thunderous entry as they launched into the climactic start for the choir after that immense build-up from the strings and wind. No one could say that any of the choir was late to the party.

The Count's *Aria* by Mozart was an absolute treat, with soloist Jonathan Brown delivering a stunning vocal performance that left the audience in awe. His deep sonorous tones, effortless control and beautifully expressive yet commanding voice were the perfect match for Mozart's composition as the Count muses on the next steps.

The Jersey Chamber Orchestra supported with great subtlety and poise. Jonathan was one of two soloists who performed at the actual Coronation at Westminster Abbey and it was a real treat and a coup to see them live in Jersey.

Next came Haydn's *Symphony No. 98*, and the orchestra's musicianship shone brightly as they navigated the piece's intricate melodies and complex rhythm, led by the chief conductor.

The orchestra's attention to detail was evident, and the performance was nothing short of sublime, exhibiting some beautiful phrasing.

The slow movement tied the piece into the theme of the concert with the opening phrase being more than a passing resemblance to *God Save the King* before resolving the phrase into a delightful different ending.

The frenetic final movement communicated great joy in its exuberant phrases and the final cheeky yet uplifting moments were a wonder to behold.

The highlight of the evening was, for

many, Mozart's *Exultate Jubilate*, sung by soloist Chen Reiss.

Demonstrating why she has been a regular at such venues as the Vienna Opera House, Royal Opera House and the Metropolitan in New York, her voice was beautiful, pure, and filled with emotion, and she conveyed the spiritual and emotional depth of the piece with incredible skill and sensitivity. The orchestra provided the perfect accompaniment, allowing her voice to soar and giving the audience a special treat.

The concert closed with Mozart's *Coronation Mass*, featuring the Jersey Festival Choir and all four soloists – Chen Reiss, Lawrence Zazzo, Mark Dobell and Jonathan Brown.

I am told that three of the choir had sung together in one of the great Cambridge choirs of the 1990s – Clare College Choir, which spun out so many remarkable singers. They were supported by the choir's energy and enthusiasm which were infectious.

Particularly impressive was the bounce of the sopranos and the expressive faces which were matched by a vibrant tone. The Festival Choir was well balanced and this was one of the best performances that I have seen.

The soloists each brought their unique vocal qualities to the performance. At times Chen duetted with the sensitive lines of tenor Mark Dobell – another who sang at the Coronation in Westminster Abbey, at other times with counter-tenor Lawrence Zazzo, who is feted as one of the world's finest.

Chen's *Agnus Dei* was a real delight, showing great control and projection in the lower notes in the register while effortlessly singing the beautiful lines. The orchestra provided a perfect backdrop, supporting the voices with sensitivity and grace.

Overall, the Jersey Chamber Orchestra's performance under Eamonn Dougan's direction was simply breathtaking. The musicianship and artistry of both the orchestra and soloists were truly exceptional, and the programme was a perfect balance of regal elegance, playful charm, and spiritual depth.

It was a night to remember, and I cannot wait to see what this talented ensemble will bring to the stage in the future.

The standing ovation to conclude the concert was a fitting end to the evening.