

Landmark concert plan for 26-year-old Nantwich choral group

Choristers tune up for their cathedral debut

by **KATIE COOKSEY**

DRAMATIC solos and more than 100 voices will ring around Chester Cathedral when the Nantwich Choral Society makes its debut in the prestigious venue next month.

The society, which is backed by Bentley Motors, is in full swing rehearsing for their prestigious first concert in the cathedral on April 1, when they will perform Bach's *St John Passion* with a fine array of soloists.

Musical director John Naylor said: "This promises to be a powerful and moving event, something quite special."

"There will be some 100 singers, who will make a fine sound in the dramatic chorus of the *St John's Passion*."

"We have some outstanding soloists and I'm really looking forward to working with the Baroque orchestra and the Lydian Singers again."

Internationally-renowned tenor Rogers Covey-Crump will appear in the title role of John the Evangelist – a role he is famous for world-wide.

Andrew Mildinhall, resident rehearsal pianist for the choral society, will take to the stage as a soloist along with Jamie Hall, who is well known for his work with The Boarder Singers as well as a lay clerk at the cathedral.

The Lydian Singers will join the Nantwich choristers group, which was formed in 1970, with support from leading Baroque ensemble the 18th Century Concert Orchestra on period instruments.

Upcoming concerts for the Nantwich Choral Society include varied music such as Gilbert and Sullivan, Gershwin and Cole Porter.

Tickets for the Chester Cathedral performance can be ordered from the Gateway Theatre box office on 01244 340392.

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REALLY MOTORING: Members of Nantwich Choral Society line up with their principal sponsors, Bentley Motors

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BACH ST JOHN PASSION
Cathedral 01 April

Chester music lovers have had the rare opportunity to hear Bach's two great settings of the Passion story, by St Matthew and St John on successive Saturdays. Last Saturday it was the turn of the combined forces of the Nantwich Choral Society and the Knutsford-based Lydian Singers, with orchestra and soloists, under the direction of John Naylor to perform the St John Passion, more dramatic than its sister work but equally beautiful and moving.

This performance began well and simply got better and better as the music unfolded. The spacious tempi chosen by Naylor allowed Bach's score to live and breathe so that the meaning of both music and words could be clearly put across. Particularly noticeable in the choir was its ability to sing softly when directed to do so, and the moving interpretation of the final 'Sleep well' chorus. Despite occasional uncertainties this was choral singing of a high standard.

Naylor was blessed also in the choice of Rogers Covey-Crump to sing the key role of the Evangelist. His performance was faultless, with purity of tone matched by clarity of diction. Cathedral lay clerk Jamie Hall also excelled in the role of Jesus, and would appear to have a good career in prospect. The other soloists, James Hall in the role of Pilate, Janet Ollier (soprano), Ruth Theobald (contralto), Stephen Newlove (tenor) and Quentin Brown (bass) all made good contributions and were heard clearly.

The 18th Century Concert Orchestra, with Andrew Mildinhall (organ continuo) and Chris Howell (cello continuo) provided accompaniment of the kind Bach actually wrote, and did so effectively. But the evening as a whole belonged to John Naylor for directing a performance of what by any test is a choral masterpiece with such integrity, commitment and musicality. This proved, incidentally, that when it comes to major sacred works the Cathedral has no equal in Chester as a venue.

Bill Glover