

A Rich Legacy

Looking back on two Easter Festivals simultaneously is quite a challenge and, as I attempt the task, I am immediately struck by the huge differences in feel and *colour* of the two events – contrasts dictated by influences outwith our control.

Easter 2008 happened to fall on the earliest possible date in the church's calendar and, with the changing school term structure, we were forced to plan the Festival well after Easter weekend to accommodate the school holidays that bring many of our performers and audience to St Endellion. Whilst this format may have passed unnoticed by some, after 35 years of always being part of either Holy Week or Easter Week at Endellion, for many of us there was a strange feeling of being adrift from the working life of the parish, rather than complementing this busy time of year for them. Having said that, we were delighted to be once more under the watchful eye of a Rector, and John May's arrival has given the Festival back its stability that an interregnum can sometimes undermine. As I write this John and July will, all being well, be finishing the unpacking of their remove to the Rectory this spring – we wish them many years joy there.

Despite the odd positioning of the 2008 Festival, it was still wonderful in music and camaraderie. As sometimes occasionally happens, the preparations had been fraught with dramas, testing the administration considerably! But once there, Endellion worked her magic and one's memories are only good, some random highlights for me being the sparkling Spring Sonata to open the Festival, Finzi's Clarinet Concerto and Copland's Appalachian Spring. Jeremy Young gave two virtuoso performances of Ravel's Piano Concerto in the concert with Mozart's Great C Minor Mass the choir for which had been admirably trained by our "guest" chorus master, Eamonn Dougan. Voted *A Most Promising Newcomer* (an Endellion euphemism for someone of considerable ability!) we very much hope he will return, as he threw himself into the Festival on all levels – training the choir, singing the bass solos, washing up and leading a close harmony group in the Late Night Concert. This event happily followed the previous year's Cabaret, starting with a Maori lullaby and travelling through lieder, jazz and nocturnes to end with our maestro, Jamie Burton, singing Bernstein's *Some Other Time*. Jamie had an epic week, masterfully leading us in a varied and testing programme – that he was able to sit down at the piano in a candlelit church and produce a very different type of Festival magic is both testament to him and the place, and is why some of us have been coming for so long! Nothing is ever mundane at St. Endellion.....

So what of the Easter Festival 2009? For some reason I knew from last spring that this was going to be a special year, partly because we had decided on Bach's St Matthew Passion as the central work, which is definitely a "signature tune" for the Easter Festival. When, on 23rd November 2008, Richard's death left an unacceptable void in the lives of his immediate family, and cast a shadow over many lives around the world, including those of Endellionites, I was determined that this spring should be exceptionally special and, for those of us who knew him, should be a real thanksgiving for his life and work.

At least we were back in our normal "date zone", beginning on Palm Sunday and ending on Easter Day. This obviously dictates our programme planning to a certain extent, and another factor was definitely the outgoing Bishop of Truro's vision, that Endellion should become a significant centre for Spirituality and the Arts – many of us would say it had been this for some while..... So, to enhance the spirituality side, Richard Harries (former Bishop of Oxford, writer and broadcaster) was asked to preach on Easter morning and from that invitation he also found himself giving a reflective Good Friday lecture on the Passion through Art and was one of the speakers in a series of five, 8.45am, *Thoughts for the Day* throughout Holy Week which proved extremely popular and, hopefully, will become a regular fixture.

On the music side, unlike 2008, we had had an apparently easy approach to the Festival, everything falling effortlessly into place. Then, of course, a few weeks prior, the dramas roll in – illness, double bookings, complicated keyboard hire etc etc – perhaps it was ever thus, and everything did eventually resolve to produce an absolute vintage year, both musically and socially. The first two chamber concerts were a joyous celebration of wonderful music by some of our star participants, and they effortlessly led into the midweek Orchestral and Choral concert that gave, among other works, an astonishing performance of Strauss's *Metamorphosen*. Thought by some to be one of the saddest and darkest pieces of music written, it had an added dimension at Endellion which one hopes might have given Strauss hope in his incredibly dark times of 1945.

I had, for years, wanted to programme a performance of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, and a Late Night Candelit Concert on Maundy Thursday this year seemed a perfect occasion – and it was. One of the hardest pieces in the chamber repertoire, Adi Brett, Keith Slade, Ben Gregor Smith and Jeremy Young electrified the audience with their virtuosity and their sensitivity to an extraordinary work, and we went out into the darkness in a suitably thoughtful state. And then.... the two St Matthew Passions, key to this year's Festival and to its history and to the memory of Richard. This great work by Bach had been our inspiration to start the Easter Festival in 1974 and performing it this year was one of the most difficult but also one of the most uplifting experiences in my life. We had a magnificent line up of soloists, Katy Hill, Marie Elliott, James Edwards and Robert Rice, with the inspirational leadership of John Graham Hall and David Stout as the Evangelist and Christ respectively, and the orchestra and chorus reaching new heights under the great direction of Jamie Burton. I think Richard, in between cheering on the Busby Babes in the celestial Premier League and chatting to Sir Adrian Boult about the finer points of *Gerontius*, would be pretty happy with our offering, in his memory, of one of his favourite works, and for Pamela, Adam and Abigail, Tom and me, Jean and Char, that St. Matthew was a tribute, given from us through the hearts and hands and voices of the Endellion family. We then segued through the Service of Light to a glorious warm Easter morning and a golden Final Concert of delicious Parry, Bruch and Brahms.

So, a very special Festival on so many fronts – I *have* to stress my gratitude to one other key player, Cheryl Feldon (and her team) who, yet again, sustained us gastronomically on a magical level, producing suppers each night for up to 180 folk (a possible record) in a house that sleeps 9 (perhaps one of the reasons for the Golden Jubilee Appeal!) and who hosted our traditional Jazz Party at the beginning of the Festival, serving paella from a pan four feet wide, and illuminating the tired Glebe Farm yard with blazing braziers and fairy lights. And, apart from the wildest of gales on the Tuesday evening when audience and performers alike were tossed about in the dark as they made their way to the carpark, we were blessed with some really warm sunshine and clear starlit nights. For all this I am grateful, and also particularly to Jamie, to my long suffering committee, to friends old and new, to John May for his enthusiasm and sensitive support, and to the place, without which little would make any sense.

None of the original founders of the St Endellion Festival takes part any longer, but they remain hugely supportive and should be proud of the astonishing legacy they have left.. Rich has added to that legacy, and his mark on both Festivals will remain distinct, and we who continue will endeavour to build on his inspiration and energy in the years to come, helping to present St Endellion to the amazed onlooker as the unique experience that so many of us have made part of our lives.

Please join us next Easter – April 4th -11th 2010.

Frances Hickox.
Chairman St Endellion Easter Festival