

Kent and Sussex Courier

19th April, 1912

Great Hall, Tunbridge Wells.
Wednesday, May 8, 7.45

The world's greatest choral work BACH'S B MINOR MASS, Francis J. Foote's Choir and professional orchestra - 150 performers - eminent artistes.
SOPRANO Miss Ada Forrest, TENOR Mr. Cynlais Gibbs,
ALTO Miss Gertrude Lonsdale, BASS Mr. Thorpe Bates.
LEADER Spencer Dyke, CONDUCTOR Francis J. Foote A.R.A.M.
Carriages at 9.45.

Repeated on 26th April, 1912

Kent and Sussex Courier
10th May 1912

A MEMORIAL CONCERT.

MR. FRANCIS J. FOOTES' CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA PERFORM BACH'S "B MINOR MASS."

Music is undoubtedly the most human of all the arts. Painters and sculptors are restrained by certain rules and conventions; they can but depict the emotions, but music can express them in a vital fashion, and there is no depth of joy or sorrow that cannot be touched by a chord or a cadence, though the composer may be long since dead. This was felt at the performance given in the Great Hall on Wednesday evening by Mr. Francis J. Foote and his choir and professional orchestra. For the work—chosen with pathetic appropriateness as things turned out—was the massive and magnificent Mass in B Minor by Bach. When Mr. Foote began to rehearse this, which is acknowledged to be the greatest choral work extant, he little thought it would take the form of a requiem for those lost to us by a great national disaster, or that its proceeds would go to assuage the needs of those who have suffered so sorely by that loss; yet had he been able to foretell this tragedy of the sea, where could he have found in the whole library of vocal and instrumental music a dirge so wonderful as the "Crucifixus," with its grand opening chords, a chorus breathing so fervently of the life beyond the grave, as "Et resurrexit," or a finale so full of the essence of peace as "Dona nobis pacem?" All these and many other magnificent numbers are contained in the B Minor Mass of Sebastian Bach, who was brought back to life again by the spirited performance of his music at the concert in question. All the public testimonials to the Titanic sufferers and survivors have been noble, unselfish, and thoroughly English, but a tribute from musicians like those of Francis J. Foote's choir and orchestra has a pathetic significance, because of the association of those other musicians whose death was the finest and most heroic thing in the whole disaster. It may not be generally known that Wesley Woodward, the cellist on the ill-fated vessel, who was named after his ancestor, the great Charles Wesley, lived and worked for many years in Eastbourne, where Mr. Foote's name is becoming a household word in the musical world.

The latter, in undertaking to give a concert of the lofty and ambitious character of last Wednesday, could be relied upon for carrying out the smallest details with the greatest artistry; and so it was no surprise that the Great Hall was decorated with taste and a good sense of the fitness of things. Purple and white drapery were used to good effect in front of the platform, while the Conductor's desk was branched with white and mauve lilac, smaller groups of the kind being carried all the way along. A big laurel wreath, tied with deep purple ribbon, was the central ornament, and this, we learn, was the gift of Mr. Smith, the local florist.

The audience was large and happily very receptive; only now and again, after a specially beautiful reading of some number, was the Conductor's wish for unbroken silence broken through by a faint applause from the back, but this, by its very garishness, was soon quelled, and the sense of enjoyment all around was profound.

Mr. Foote was fortunate, as usual, in his choice of principals. Such support as was afforded by Miss Ada Forrest (soprano), Miss Gertrude Lonsdale (alto), Mr. Cynlais Gibbs (tenor), and Mr. Thorpe Bates (bass) being naturally of immense value to the production. The duet, "Christe Eleison," by the two ladies, was enhanced by the beauty of the strings, the incidental music here being exceptionally fine, and the orchestral solo by Mr. Spencer Dyke (leader) was a feature of "Laudemus te," so exquisitely rendered by Miss Ada Forrest. The duet between this lady and Mr. Cynlais Gibbs, "Domine Deus," was also a beautiful piece of singing, in which both executants earned the warmest admiration.

Miss Gertrude Lonsdale manifested exactly the right religious fervour in "Qui Sedes ad dexteram Patris," and was rewarded with an exquisite floral tribute at the close of her work.

Mr. Thorpe Bates sang with the assurance that satisfies an audience, but not with the self-assurance that distracts it, the great bass solo, "Et in Spiritum Sanctum"; and Mr. Cynlais Gibbs did equally well in the "Benedictus." Some regret was occasioned that owing to the lateness of the hour, and the necessity for catching the London train, some of the numbers had to be omitted, notably the glorious solo, "Agnus Dei," which we are sure Miss Lonsdale would have done justice to.

The choir is just now better constituted than ever it has been, otherwise Mr. Foote dared not have risked his musical reputation by presenting so ambitious a work as the "B Minor Mass." But he dug no pitfalls for himself, and his choice was fully justified before many bars had been sung of the grand opening chorus, "Kyrie Eleison," which is followed by a largo of surpassing beauty. Always the climax was well worked up, though the pianissimo were thoughtfully observed, especially in the touching chorus, "Et Incarnatus Est. Perhaps the finest piece of choral work was in "Et resurrexit, the staccato effects at the close of the "Sanctus" delighting the cultured ear, and "Hosanna in excelsis," was, as it should be, in very truth, a hymn of praise. One felt that the choir, the orchestra and the conductor, were in the very atmosphere of Bach when he wrote this memorable Mass, and how could the audience escape from its enveloping influence?

Among the fashionable audience we noticed Mr. Councillor Vaughan Gower (Deputy Mayor), who was supported by Mr. Alderman Caley, Mr. Councillor Snell and others. The Mayor (Councillor Sydney Sladen) was unavoidably absent, but among others present were Mr. and Mrs. Eginald Bull, Miss Walford, Mr. and Mrs. Mackenzie Fairfax (who was staying at the Calverley Hotel), Mrs. Valentine Pegge (of Eastbourne), Miss Murley, Miss Sibella Jones and others. Madame Sarah Grand is prohibited from attending evening functions just now, and much regretted her inability to be present. Immediately after the Mass, which had been preceded by an impressive rendering of the "Dead March in Saul" (Handel), and of the hymn, "Nearer my God to Thee," Mr. Councillor Vaughan Gower, on behalf of the Mayor, to whose fund for the Titanic sufferers the profits of the concert are to be devoted, congratulated Mr. Foote very heartily on the performance. He confessed that he thought at first the choice of this Mass of Bach was a very courageous, not to say a presumptuous one, for it was the most exacting thing of the kind ever written, and bristling with technicalities; but every bar had been perfectly interpreted, and had been listened to with rapturous enjoyment. He especially thanked Mr. Foote for his generosity in giving the proceeds of the concert to the Mayor's Fund, but the expenses of such a concert must naturally be very heavy, and the suggestion had been acted upon of having a collection at the door to augment the fund.

Help towards the concert was forthcoming from various quarters, Messrs. Harris and Co. having kindly lent the chairs, while Messrs. Durnall generously moved the piano, which had been lent by the kindness of Messrs. Hermitage free of charge. Mr. Strange, the choir's first Secretary, looked after the seating arrangements, which were admirably managed; also other official duties connected with the municipal side of the concert.

A memorial concert given after the Titanic disaster