

Review - DCC's 2022 Workshop Concert
Saturday 26 February at Buckfast Abbey

Rachmaninov - Priidite Poklominsya (from the All-Night Vigil [Vespers])
John Tavener - Svyati: words from the Russian Orthodox prayer - O Holy One
Arvo Pärt - Spiegel im Spiegel, arranged for cello and organ
Rachmaninov - Bogoroditse Djevo (Ave Maria from the All-Night Vigil)
Bach - Cello Suite in G major
Ola Gjeilo - O Magnum Mysterium (for double choir and cello)
Balfour Gardiner - Evening Hymn

There are times when a concert offers so much more than performance because the power of the music touches hearts and minds and captures the mood of the times. Dartington Community Choir's Choral Workshop concert at Buckfast Abbey on the 26th of February 2022 was one such experience, when the workshop choir, cellist Barbara Degener, and David Davies, the Abbey's organist, came together to present a programme of sublime music, dedicated to the people of Ukraine.

In his introductory remarks, the guest conductor, James Davey, explained that over two years ago he had chosen this programme for the DCC workshop, planned for 2021 but postponed due to the Covid 19 lockdown. Little could he have known then how appropriate, and meaningful, this programme would now prove to be, for the centrepiece of the concert was Tavener's *Svyati*.

This beautiful and moving piece uses a text from the Orthodox funeral liturgy and is sung in Church Slavonic as a dialogue between choir and cello. It was first performed at the Cricklade Music Festival in 1995, by the Kyiv Chamber Choir with Steven Isserlis (cello) and directed by the celebrated Ukrainian conductor Mykola Gobdych.

As the plaintive notes of a distant cello echoed across the stillness of the Abbey, the solemn and poignant significance of this music was then given further resonance by the choir. At the close of the piece the moments of silence which followed reflected the powerful emotional impact of this outstanding music.

The choir had risen impressively to the challenge of learning and performing a demanding programme in one day. Under James' expert direction, they sang with mastery and feeling, and with the satisfaction of clearly communicating with their audience.

Barbara Degener's accomplished cello interludes completed an outstanding concert. This was, indeed, a memorable evening, at the end of an immensely rewarding day.