

Wonderful concert by the Bach Choir

John Manning reviews the St Albans Bach Choir's concert at St Albans Cathedral on Saturday.

It is so rare to hear a live performance of Richard Strauss's wonderfully moving *Four Last Songs* that such an event would make a visit to a concert where they were included well worthwhile.

But when the programme also included Brahms' *German Requiem* it became almost irresistible.

That was the programme presented by the St Albans Bach Choir at the city's cathedral on Saturday, when they were joined by the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra and soloists soprano Elizabeth Atherton and baritone Edward Grint.

Composed in the last year of his life, Strauss's *Four Last Songs* were never performed in his lifetime, but since their premiere in London in 1950 have become much loved.

Elizabeth Atherton's performance on Saturday left an audience begging for more,



Musical director Andrew Lucas.

but alas there was no more to sing.

The emotionally charged words of poets Joseph von Eichendorff and Herman Hess leave nothing more to say and Elizabeth's performance was a delight.

She performed the four songs with great clarity and just the right amount of emotion and her higher register was outstanding.

The horn solo at the end of the second song, *September*,

was outstanding, as was the later violin solo.

If I have a criticism it was about the balance between the orchestra and the soloist.

I feel the orchestra was, on occasions, a little too loud and masked Elizabeth's fine voice.

Brahms' *German Requiem* is one of those works that can be very dreary, but not in the hands of the St Albans Bach Choir and their musical director Andrew Lucas.

Their performance left little to be desired.

The choir's diction is outstanding, and their singing is precise.

Andrew Lucas has long demonstrated his outstanding skills as a choir trainer and the performance on Saturday was yet another example of the high level of excellence he and the choir members achieve.

Both Elizabeth Atherton and baritone Edward Grint added greatly to the overall success of the evening and the orchestra worked extremely well with the larger forces of the choir.