



# Orchestra of St. John

## Reviews



ORCHESTRA OF ST JOHN'S, BROMSGROVE PARISH CHURCH

BY CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

For a small market town in north Worcestershire, Bromsgrove is well blessed in its musical provision: it has an imaginative concert club, it boasts a splendid amateur orchestra in the form of the Orchestra of St John, and it also hosts a lively annual festival. OSJ concluded its busy weekend MusicFest 2018 with a Gala Concert which also marked the finale of this year's Bromsgrove Festival, joyously celebrating all the orchestra's many strengths, and benefiting from the infectious enthusiasm of conductor Richard Jenkinson. A few days previously Jenkinson had delivered a profoundly moving cello recital, and now he brought all his orchestral experience (he was a much-missed principal with the CBSO) to his nurturing of OSJ -- though I wonder if he'd ever had to cope with the scattering on the floor of the front-desk cello

parts as the end of Brahms' First Symphony approached (the ladies involved rode the crisis magnificently). Christopher Morley This was an account of the Brahms which did its best to leaven the turgid textures the composer sets up in his worthy but misguided quest to build a kind of thematic unity throughout the work. Tempi were well-chosen, woodwind solos (oboe in particular) were eloquently turned, trombones were fatly comfortable in their warmth, and the horns were as magnificent as we have come to expect from this remarkable OSJ complement. And the horns were an important aspect of Beethoven's Fidelio Overture, breaking the opening tension which Jenkinson had built during the introduction, and giving heroism a constant presence in what can be perceived as the poor relation in the composer's desperate search for a prelude to his only completed opera. Benjamin Frith was soloist in Beethoven's First Piano Concerto, generous in his exploration of the composer's inexperienced experiments, and sharing an empathetic collaboration from his strangely - placed piano with Jenkinson and his orchestra. There was some clipping of phrases in the jazzy finale, but the whole effect was one of music-making on its happiest scale.

Christopher Morley