

## Dartington Community Choir Workshop – 4<sup>th</sup> March 2023

### Durufié's *Requiem*

#### Buckfast Abbey

In early March, singers from Devon and beyond came together, to join Dartington Community Choir in a successful one-day choral workshop at Buckfast Abbey. The Choir had been delighted to secure as its Guest Conductor for the day, Tori Longdon, co-founder of the Stay at Home Choir, and her bold choice of work was Maurice Durufié's *Requiem*.

Written in 1947, Durufié set the Latin text of the Requiem Mass, structuring it in nine movements and using themes from Gregorian *Mass for the Dead*, together with his own invented chant to create not a liturgical mass but a concert work, which it truly is.

The setting matched the music - a perfect synthesis of the old and the new. The Abbey Church is a relatively modern building, but one firmly rooted in centuries of monastic tradition; the *Requiem* is a relatively modern composition firmly rooted in centuries of Gregorian plainchant. The superb acoustic and the wonderful Ruffatti organ gave resonance to both the passages of sublime lyricism and the dynamic rousing movements.

Nevertheless, the *Requiem*, presents a significant challenge for amateur, albeit talented, singers coming together for just one day. The balance between voices, and between choir and organ is not easy to achieve. The calm meditative mood demands confident voices able to sing both powerfully and quietly, and the level of concentration necessary to maintain Durufié's subtle and complex harmonies is extremely demanding. The workshop demonstrated, however, just what can be achieved by focussed and gifted amateurs under a knowledgeable and inspirational Conductor, directing with passion and reassuring authority. The two amateur soloists from Dartington Community Choir, Matt Hulbert (baritone) and Harriet Barlow (mezzo-soprano) sang with confidence, with the young cellist Finn Gonski providing a sensitive accompaniment in the Pie Jesu.

The programme also included Durufié's Prelude to Organ Suite op 5, a dramatic piece played with bravura by Robert Pecksmith, Organist and Assistant Master of the Music at Buckfast Abbey. His performance was a tour de force.

The choir rose to the challenge of rehearsing and performing in one day, and at the close, with the ethereal *In Paradisum* echoing around the Abbey, they could rest assured that all their hard work and commitment had paid off - a fine performance of this much-loved *Requiem*.

**Richard Haigh**