

Voices of the North
Londinium, conducted by Andrew Griffiths
St Sepulchre-without-Newgate, London
23 October

Review by Edward Clark

Both Sibelius and Nielsen were multi-faceted composers and the chamber choir Londinium sang representative *a cappella* works by both Nordic masters alongside pieces by other regional composers.

Rakastava can lay claim to be Sibelius's most perfect composition; it is an early work (1894) but a completely original one. Nielsen's *Tre Motetter* (1929), on the other hand, comes at the end of his career and made a much better impression at this concert than they did at the recent Prom where the polyphonic harmonies were largely lost in the Albert Hall acoustic.

Sibelius's Four Partsongs from his Op. 18 includes the heartfelt *Song of My Heart* (1898) which explores death in childhood and shows some of Sibelius's own fascination for death, a trait shared with Mahler; a year later Sibelius's third daughter died of typhus.

Other works by Peter Lange-Müller, Mogens Pederson, Wilhelm Stenhammer (to whom Sibelius dedicated his Sixth Symphony), Toivo Kuula (a pupil of Sibelius) and Einojuhani Rautavaara (who benefited from a Sibelius composition scholarship), showed how this region's choral music was able to gleam in a climate of sunlight on snow and lake. All possess a sense of identity and reviving (or giving the UK premiere?) of *Auringon noustessa* by Toivo Kuula was a delightful surprise.

Londinium, conducted with great style by Andrew Griffiths, has the twin merits of balance and clarity in its projection of each work. This was a programme of unfamiliar music sung in difficult languages but the choir members seemed very much at home with the texts.

Rakastava was beautifully projected for instance. The overall sound, affected to a degree by the reverberant church acoustic until the ear adjusted was, nevertheless, clear and confident. As claimed it is indeed a versatile chamber choir.