The University of Aberdeen Choral Society and an eleven piece orchestra were conducted by John Frederick Hudson in a commanding performance of Haydn's Mass in d minor – The Nelson Mass. I spoke to a long serving member of the choir after the performance. Gwen Haggart sang in the choir the last time they did the Nelson Mass in 1964. She told me that John Frederick Hudson managed to get the choral singers to put their whole bodies into the performance. She was right. The choral singing had a special oomph to it in so many of the choruses, something that is exactly what is required in this piece. Hudson also conducted with his whole body powering a real punch into the music.

The Mass begins in explosive style with a dramatic thud on the timpani. The timpani play a crucial part at significant points throughout the entire performance. They were played by Anmol Padam. I thought that John Hudson had brought in a professional for this performance but Anmol is in fact a third year student – so very well done Anmol. The organ was played by Andrew Morrison who is in fact a professional and so therefore gave a perfect performance.

Other star performers from the orchestra were the leader Dario Angeloni who has some lovely solo parts in the performance, for instance where he accompanies the bass soloist in the Qui tollis or in the orchestral introduction to the Benedictus. I must also mention the three trumpet players, Caitlin Diver, Tobi Wolf and Sam Hill. They gave the music a golden radiance every time they came in.

The four vocal soloists were all fantastic but I must give special mention to soprano Caitlin Bell to whom Haydn gives the most exciting, the most challenging vocal writing. Right from the start in the Kyrie, she gave a stamp of exciting quality to the performance. Her singing was wonderfully strong, confident and fluent, a real delight. The bass, Dermot O'Connor was excellent with strong smooth well-controlled bass singing. Tenor, David Walsh had a lovely clean tone that was perfect for an ecclesiastical work such as the mass. Alto Megan Cormack has the smallest part but she too was a delight to hear in the Gratias agimus tibi and in all the quartets. All the soloists ensembles were delightfully well balanced.

In many ways though it was the choral singing that was the crowning glory of the work especially the soaring sopranos but here again the balance between the different sections of the choir though of very different sizes was excellent.

There were so many delightful moments in the performance but I particularly liked Dermot O’Connor’s Qui tollis with Dario Angeloni’s violin solo over lovely gentle playing from the rest of the strings. Then again the opening of the Sanctus where the quiet music was punctuated by sudden timpani strokes. The Benedictus was unlike those written by many other composers who use gentle quartet singing with a smooth flying melody. Haydn’s Benedictus moves that idea on to the orchestral players before the soprano enters with real drama and only at the end the vocal quartet enter with more dramatic music emphasised by the timpani.

The conclusion of the work shone with a real brilliance.

This was a relatively short concert but as I have said before, quality is always better than quantity, especially when a choral work like this has obviously been really well rehearsed. Leave the audience wanting more rather than feeling that they have had more than enough.