Thursday’s concert brought together the Marischal Chamber Orchestra and the University of Aberdeen Choral Society under the dynamic direction of John Frederick Hudson. They gave radiant performances of two of the most engaging works in the entire repertoire. The Marischal Chamber Orchestra excelled in Schubert’s Symphony in b minor “The Unfinished” before being joined by the Choral Society in Mozart’s Mass in c minor, also an “unfinished” work.

The Schubert Symphony opens with a sombre introduction for cellos and basses. There were only four cellos and one bass but they managed to deliver the portentous feeling of this opening gambit perfectly with John Frederick Hudson coaxing the music from them. The oboe and clarinet brought a shaft of light with the first main theme over a finely played background of shivering strings. Throughout the concert, in the Schubert and the Mozart Mass too, Jamie Salem-Dalgety’s oboe playing was always on cue and just right. The cellos had the second main theme and played it beautifully with the rest of the strings coming in nicely and after dramatic gestures the soft sweep of the upper strings was splendidly smooth. These themes were repeated throughout the movement and they just got better and better. Actually the entire orchestra played well but I should also mention the timpani played here by Brodie McCash. John Frederick Hudson captured every twist and turn of the changes of dynamics and tempo so well.

The second movement highlighted passages for strings or woodwind and the pastoral atmosphere of the music was delivered with a real sense of style. Why did Schubert fail to complete this marvellous music? We can never be sure but Thursday’s performance just left me wanting more.

Mozart’s Mass was very different. It was more extroverted, more dynamic and certainly more dramatic. The marvellous soprano solos and duets were very much the creations of Mozart the opera composer. Jillian Bain Christie was absolutely superb in the Christe eleison or the Et incarnatus est where she was accompanied by beautiful woodwinds including that splendid oboe again. Her trills and leaps were magical.

How do I define her sound, perhaps the word purling borrowed from “the purling brook” as in Haydn’s Creation gives some idea of it.

The second soprano part was sung by Anna Wiedermann excelling in the Laudamus Te, or with Jillian in their duet Domine Deus and again with tenor Matthew Burns in the Quoniam. Anna was a proper second soprano not really a mezzo and this is what this work demands. She was perfect for the part. Over the years I have heard Matthew’s tenor voice develop and in this work he had reached a new summit in his singing career.
The bass or rather baritone Ross Cumming does not get to sing until nearly the end of the work but he gave a fine sturdy performance in the final quartet in which the four singers were nicely well balanced.

In between the exciting solos, were many no less exciting parts for the magnificent chorus. The female voices were particularly rich and well blended. There were a lot of them but I thought the men did well too although it did not help the basses being so far away from the front. I don’t know what you do about that.

Mozart’s Mass is a magnificent work, not perhaps as good as the Requiem which I regard as the best ever, but there were many sections of the Mass which certainly matched it and some solo parts which overtook it at times.

John Frederick Hudson and his orchestra gifted so much to this performance too. It was a really enjoyable evening of wonderful music playing to a packed Cathedral.