

## **Ninth Annual Festival of Sacred Music**

*The opening concert of the ninth annual festival at the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels was a winner. The varied and interesting program showed a high quality of music from a range of splendid musicians which made for a memorable event. The programming from Artistic Director Frank de Rosso is always thoughtful and effective. The singing of the Windfire Choir under the direction of Rick Prakhoff was of the highest standard and the two contrasting works were sung with nuanced expertise.*

*The climax of the evening was Handel's "Ode to Saint Cecilia's Day". This Oratorio was premiered in London in 1739 and is based on a poem by John Dryden. The theme of the text is the Pythagorean theory of harmonia mundi - that music was a central force in the creation of the earth.*

*The Windfire Instrumental Ensemble began the work with fine playing of the Overture. This was performed with artistry and skill. The impeccably high standards of this small orchestra continued throughout the performance. The choir was equally accurate and in control showing fine balance and excellent dynamic control. The two soloists - soprano Sally Wilson and tenor Robert Macfarlane performed with dramatic conviction and fine vocal expertise.*

*There were exceptionally fine solos from the flute and also a beautiful interlude for solo cello.*

*The continuo line was flexible and supportive throughout with subtle use of the harpsichord and chamber organ as well as a delicate contribution from the lute.*

*The final chorus, complete with a complicated fugue, finished the evening with a sense of triumph and rejoicing.*

*The first half of the program encompassed a Suite by Handel for solo trumpet and organ. a delicate Fantasie for solo lute and the Five Mystical Songs by Ralph Vaughan Williams.*

*Brilliant trumpet playing from Tristan Rebien from the organ gallery set the tone for the evening and Rosemary Hodgson's gentle lute playing made for a contrasting interlude.*

*The Five Mystical Songs performed by baritone Tom Healey with chorus plus string quartet and piano were expressive and convincing. The text by George Herbert was sung with understanding and subtlety. Fine accompaniment from the instrumentalists with violinist Philip Healey leading the ensemble with energy and clarity made for a dramatic and unified presentation.*

*This festival has earned a place in the calendar for all music loving people of Geelong and this was an opening concert to remember.*

Wendy Galloway