

# DUNBAR CHORAL CHRISTMAS CONCERT

by John Cairns

The Christmas Season is marked in many ways in Dunbar, some of the best small town high street lights anywhere, the Christmas Tree on top of the cement works, a variety of nativity plays, a crib outside St. Anne's and for most of the last 68 years a Carol Concert from the Dunbar Choral in Belhaven Church.

This year was no exception and a large and appreciative audience enjoyed a notably well balanced and varied programme of carols and readings. The items chosen took us on a journey through time from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, actually the First Century if one counts the reading of St Luke's Gospel, through every succeeding one to the present day. There was a geographical journey too through various sources from the USA and Canada to France, Germany, England and Scotland. In choosing such a varied collection Vaughan Townhill, the Conductor, showed the lasting, worldwide appeal of Christmas.

It is not possible to do justice to all the sixteen choral items which contained well known carols with audience participation such "Hark! the herald angels sing", a particularly ebullient "God rest you merry, gentlemen" and of course "O come all ye faithful". The Choir contributions opened with a rhythmic hand drum accompanied Gaudete which set the tone for the evening. Well balanced singing with accomplished timing and a worthy contribution from tenors and basses who though less in number were in no way overpowered by the sopranos and altos!

There were old favourites such as John Rutter's "What sweeter music" and the seasonal "Sleigh Ride" as well as first time offerings in this context of the very popular "O holy night" and an exceedingly lively new arrangement of "Christmas is coming" this last again showing to good effect the skill of David Townhill as an accompanist, even though here he needed another pair of hands which was ably provided by Barbara Bell. Your writer's own favourite was "The Wellspring" with music by Bob Chilcott, with a gentle haunting character of Celtic notes and tones. Every item was very ably rendered by the Choir and was evidence of much hard preparatory work with skilful and encouraging direction from Vaughan Townhill.

A selection of words of poetry and prose was well delivered by Gordon Roberts and the Reverend Laurence Twaddle and drew a real response from the audience. Again variety was the watchword, ranging through a poem from Aberdeenshire about "Snaw", to an article from "The Countryman", an account of a disastrous visit of a poet to a school and an extract from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol". Though Gordon shouldered the vast majority of the readings it was no surprise that Laurence drew special applause which was not only a recognition of his contribution to the evening but also an appreciation of his being a welcoming host to his Belhaven Church over the years and the very significant contribution he has made to the whole community in so many ways. He deserves the esteem in which he is held and will be much missed when he leaves for Geneva in the New Year.

The applause at the end of the evening showed that for the audience Dunbar Choral had again shown as well as sung "It's the most wonderful time of the year".