

April 8, 2013

## Music of the Passion



The Hindu

East meets west: MMA choir perform 'Redemption'. Photo: S.R. Raghunathan

### **The MMA rendered *Redemption*, a western classical composition by Indian composers**

Western classical music weaves its best stories during Lent, Passiontide and Easter. It has been for many years a tradition with the Madras Musical Association to sing during Lent arias, cantatas and choruses by composers such as Bach and Stainer. Bach's lyrical and romantic *St. Mathew's Passion* recalls Christ's last mortal week with fervour while Stainer's *Crucifixion* invites the listener to pause and reflect on the mystery of redemption.

For the first time this year, the MMA choir chose to sing a western classical composition by Indian composers, Richard J. Singh and Dr. Mathuram Santosham. *Redemption*, was composed by the Trivandrum-born engineer, Singh and the Madras-based doctor and Member of Parliament, Santosham in 1963. Since then it has been part of the Lenten repertoire in many churches in Chennai. To celebrate the birth centenary of Dr. Santosham the MMA performed the cantata with a choir of 100 voices. It also marked the occasion with the release of a CD *Choruses by Masters* by Haricharan Dass, chairman of Musee Musical.

The singing of the Passion on Good Friday is a tradition that harks back to the Middle Ages. Through the centuries the telling has moved from pure narrative to music to enactment and the MMA choir opened the stage with Stainer's 'God So Loved the World'. All four voices — sopranos, altos, tenors and basses — delivered a pitch-perfect rendition with no musical accompaniment that sounded fascinating in the dry acoustic ambience of the Museum Theatre.

With Augustine Paul wielding the baton, Edwin Roy at the piano and Joshua Daniel on the keyboard *Redemption* opened with two soloists, Sunny Abraham and Pallavi Raj, taking centrestage. Pallavi's bell-like voice melded with Sunny's rich tenor to tell the story of God's promise. Following this was the rich instrumental 'Triumphant March' that held a mirror to Roy's pianism which has only matured and delighted over the years.

Sangita Santosham sang the part of the narrator through the scenes at the garden of Gethsemane, the hall of judgment, the march to Calvary, the meeting of Jesus with his mother and the women of Jerusalem, the seven words of Christ on the cross, his death and resurrection, with clarity and balance of tenor and often with pathos and feeling. Arpith Siromoney sang the part of Jesus, his rich bass rendering with remarkable tensile strength the anguish of Christ in his last days. The other soloists — Harshita Krishnan, Alfred Venkatarangam, Mhathung Odyuo, Ebenezer Arunkumar, Revi Thomas, Mary Rodriguez, Emmanuel Prathap Singh, Roshni Rajan, Tabitha Martyn, Sunila Rajan, Shilvi Sharon, Nadisha Thomas and Anupa Paul — sang in voices that glinted and blended with the choruses who sang in polyphony for the crowd scenes. The choir ended the evening with John Rutter's Gaelic blessing 'The Lord Bless You and Keep You'.

The evening's performance simmered with intensity without delving too deeply into musical intricacies, lending the pieces a rare charm that is difficult to achieve in heavy Lenten music. The musicians were buoyed by eloquent conducting on the part of both Ebenezer Arunkumar and Augustine Paul.

With the hovering serenity of the last 'Amen' the story of Easter was born anew, once again.