

**Colourful singing lights up
the 2015 Youth Choirs' Competition
held at the Dorking Halls on Saturday, 14th March**

On a bright sunny morning, nineteen youth choirs lit up the Dorking Halls with their colourful attire and vibrant singing in the annual Leith Hill Musical Festival Youth Choirs' Competition. An audience as enthusiastic as the young singers enjoyed music from across the choral spectrum: acappella performances; songs with complex harmonies; lyrics in Spanish, Russian and Swahili; sign language and even trumpet accompaniment.

Choirs from around Surrey each performed two contrasting pieces. It is noticeable how repertoire at the competition is changing over the years with the appearance of popular hits from artists such as Bruno Mars, Tim Minchin and the ubiquitous *Let it Go* from the Disney movie *Frozen*, the latter proving a challenge for young voices with its wide vocal range. There was still room for the perennial favourites with children's choirs such as Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* and Bob Chilcott's *Can You Hear Me?*

Festival President John Rutter's *Heavenly Aeroplane* flew in with Cumnor House Girls' School Chamber Choir from Purley who won the *11 years and under small choirs* class with their outstanding rendition. Banstead Community Junior School Choir's conductor, Jacqui Burke, was praised for the visible encouragement she gave her singers, aided by none other than the Festival's Accompanist, Alan Brown. Hoe Bridge Preparatory School Senior Choir from Old Woking gave a spirited performance of *Weeping (N'Kosi Sikeleli Africa)* arranged by Alexander L'Estrange that was premièred by Dorking Choral Society on the very same stage in *Zimbe!*, a suite of African music that is now performed all over the world.

Encuentro Encantador from The Priory C. of E. School, Dorking, were one of several choirs to have the audience clapping with them in time to the music with their energetic performance of *'Uptown Funk'* complete with cool shades! Other audience favourites were the two Rock Choirs from Pennethorpe School who had everyone tapping and clapping along and The Ashcombe School from Dorking. It was encouraging to see so many boys and young men competing throughout the day, particularly in the older choirs. Keep it up chaps!

Giving feedback to the choirs was adjudicator, Amy Bebbington, more regularly seen conducting Holmbury St. Mary Choral Society in the competitions at the adults' Festival. There was praise for rhythmic energy, sustained lines, passion, meaning, versatility and variety, along with advice on repertoire to suit young voices, varying dynamics and keeping the tempo steady.

"Formidable performances – you just blew me away," said Amy of the mixed age youth choirs' class that drew the competition to its conclusion.

A day to remember for the young singers and their supporters.

Jo Forrest
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