

Voces8/Tuks Camerata review — the radiant thrill of 88 voices

Christ Church Spitalfields, E1

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Voces8 and Tuks Camerata at Christ Church Spitalfields. JAMES BERRY

★★★★☆

The closing concert of the Spitalfields summer festival was an object lesson in the joyous and healing benefits of people of all stripes standing together and singing their hearts out (from memory too). Eight of the voices, comprising Voces8, are well known for their albums, videos and immaculately groomed renditions of repertoire ranging from solid gold to soft-centred trinkets that might require a visit to the dentist.

However, you would be unlikely to have met the 80 members of Tuks Camerata, the visiting student choir from the University of Pretoria (most of them not studying music), with their clearly inspiring principal conductor Michael Barrett. Whether wrapped round the audience in the side aisles or massed together in front, the choir filled Nicholas Hawksmoor's soaring church with sounds to match, delivered with such depth of feeling and warming tone that you felt the impact in your very bones.

In Barrett's arrangements of traditional African songs, swaying, shaking and drumming only increased the South Africans' power, although without leaving dents in their ensemble sense or impressively supple phrasing. Placed alongside lusty repertoire like that, Voces8's bits of cool jazz — Bach according to Ward Swingle, the Frank Sinatra hit *Come Fly With Me* — couldn't help sounding mannered and thin, however exquisitely delivered. Soggy folk-rock (Mumford & Sons's *Timshel*) didn't serve them too well either; not the case with their opening Byrd motet, *Haec Dies*, or the grave beauty of *Heyr himna smidur*, a medieval Icelandic hymn.

The concert's last third finally featured both forces singing together in a further international cocktail of song. Mathematically, the Pretorians dominated, but with Voces8 happily embedded within, separate identities didn't matter. Pulses quickened particularly in Jake Runestad's *Let My Love Be Heard*, an expression of grief so heartfelt that it became uplifting. That in turn was topped by the sacred fervour of Bruckner's motet *Os Justi*, with its layers of sound grandly built up only to wind down to an affectingly simple alleluia. By this time, bubblegum Bach was long forgotten. All that mattered was the radiant thrill of 88 voices, hopefully spreading harmony round the world.