

The Telegraph

Where Two Worlds Touch, Salisbury Festival, review

This concert in an Anglican cathedral combined two different worlds: Islam and Christianity. Rating: * * * *



By [Ivan Hewett](#)

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Anglican cathedrals have become hospitable to all kinds of art in recent years. I've seen jazz, sculpture, modern dance and light shows; but never a whirling dervish, until last Saturday.

Actually, the dancer Ziya Azazi isn't a literal dervish, but he gave a wonderful artistic evocation of one, as part of the Salisbury Festival's new choral extravaganza, *Where Two Worlds Touch*. He appeared and disappeared in front of the choir like an apparition, first in dazzling white, then green, then blue. Each time he whirled more ecstatically, sometimes holding the skirts high above his head like a parasol, at one point seeming to shrink to nothing like a mouse.

It was all very apt, as this form of whirling dance originated with a heterodox mystical tradition in Islam, as did most of the words sung by the two choirs. That was one of the "two worlds" evoked in this piece; the other was the mystical tradition in Christianity. Where they touch is in the perception that when the Divine is reached, all the distinctions between the different faiths drop away.

How to evoke such a deep concept musically? It's a tricky undertaking, especially when the two composers involved come from very different traditions. Howard Moody (who also directed the performance) springs from the art-music world, Helen Chadwick from theatre and folk music. Yet the surprising thing was how well they complemented each other. The guiding image was of two separate things becoming one, symbolised by the Salisbury Community Choir moving during the course of the 75 minute piece from the back of the cathedral, to join the Salisbury festival singers at the front.

This journey was articulated by musical patterning as colourful and varied as the stained-glass window above our heads. We heard ethereal trios from female voices perched in a gallery, four-part harmony from a vocal quartet and every variety of vocal sound.

Moody's contributions were ingeniously coloured by a brass quintet and percussion, and included jazzy and Spanish-flavoured numbers, but at times they seemed over-sophisticated. Helen Chadwick's guilelessly simple pieces were much more moving, above all her setting of Rumi's text "The lamps are different but the light's the same." The voices of the two choirs rose and fell in a vibrating, communal outcry, in a way that caught the mystical import of the words without appearing to try.