



Delightful tribute to member's memory

Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society last Saturday presented the large audience with a strong programme of works, two of which have a particular association with St. Nicholas' Day, December 6. The Oratorio chorus, the choristers of Wells Cathedral, Sarum Orchestra (leader: Daphne Moody), and the Blandiver Ensemble with the four solo singers, Rebecca Outram, Penelope Davies, Jeffrey Lloyd Roberts and Jonathan Brown were conducted by Matthew Owens.

The performance of Benjamin Britten's St. Nicholas Cantata received some fine playing by the Sarum Orchestra and the Ensemble.

There were well-articulated and confident passages from the Cathedral Choristers.

Jeffrey Lloyd-Roberts sang the vocally demanding and substantial role of Nicholas with its various lyrical moments, impassioned cries and dramatic outbursts with conviction although with the occasional loss of tonal quality and intonation.

The chorus was at its best in those numbers of a more relaxed homophonic nature, singing with an appropriate sense of phrasing and dynamics, most notably in His piety and marvellous works.

The final movement, The Death of Nicholas, was truly memorable.

Mathew Owens steered the large forces of performers through the cantata with great skill, choosing tempos, dynamics and moments of repose that enabled the tension of the drama to ebb and flow successfully.

Haydn's *Missa Sancti Nicolai* invites brisk and pacey tempos but in the cathedral's expansive acoustic over-zealous tempos were always going to be at the expense of clear articulation in some of those places with shorter and more complex rhythms.

The solo quartet did produce something of a cohesive force as the Mass progressed but often in the ensembles they seemed like four individual voices unable to relax with the chosen tempos.

The chorus sang with great joy for the most part, if at moments rushed and unsteadied by the speed.

The concert began with Mozart's serene *Laudate Dominum*, sung with grace by Rebecca Outram, and a wonderful choice with which to establish the dedication of the concert to the memory of Marion Barrett, a long-serving member of the Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society.

Andrew Maddocks