



## Outstanding performance of great work merited the applause

A capacity audience gathered in Wells Cathedral on Saturday evening to hear that most popular of all oratorios, Handel's Messiah.

The Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society gave a splendid performance under the brilliant direction of Matthew Owens. They were in splendid voice and from their first number, *And the Glory of the Lord*, to the final *Amen* filled the space with warm, vibrant sound. The famed *Hallelujah* chorus with its addition of trumpets and drums to the orchestra was especially thrilling. The sopranos, in particular, scaled the heights with a burnished tone and the basses gave solid support on the bottom line.

At times the tenors seemed a little underpowered and once or twice showed some sign of strain at the top of the range. The choice of tempi was always apt – the allegros were crisp but not rushed and the slower sections were not allowed to drag. Some of Handel's difficult florid writing was not always cleanly articulated but overall this was choral singing of a high order.

The four soloists acquitted themselves well. Outstanding among them was the soprano, Ali Darragh whose agile coloratura negotiated the rapid passages with ease. Her sensitive rendering of *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth* was one of the highlights of the evening.

The three male soloists are members of the Wells Vicars Choral. Counter tenor Simon Clulow produced a pleasant sound with none of the plumminess one often associates with this voice. He gave a moving account of *He Was Despised*.

Iain Macleod-Jones has a clear tenor with excellent diction and gave a good account of *Thy Rebuke Hath Broken His Heart* from Part Two giving due attention to the text.

Bass Christopher Sheldrake has a powerful voice and gave dramatic weight to his contributions. He was joined by a solo trumpet (whose name, unfortunately, was not listed in the programme) for an exciting performance of *The Trumpet Will Sound*.

The accompaniment was provided by the Chameleon Baroque Orchestra performing on period instruments. They played with great spirit and accuracy throughout. Their modest size and the lightness of volume which they produced meant that they were often submerged under the huge body of sound from the choir.

Notwithstanding the minor points of criticism above, this was a really outstanding performance of this great work which fully merited the warm and sustained applause which Matthew Owens and his forces received at the end.

**Brendan Sadler**