



Power and the glory live in the memory

The Dream of Gerontius is a blend of powerful drama, mystical thought and spiritual conviction.

Its subject is the passing of Gerontius through the curtain of death and the passage of his soul through purgatory to its heavenly home.

When such events are so finely and passionately crafted, the challenge to the performers is to match the commitment of the work's creators, John Newman and Edward Elgar, and to ride with conviction the technical and artistic demands put their way.

This performance, under the authoritative conducting of Matthew Owens, was dedicated to a benefactor of the Society, Edna Lilian Blake, and this may have helped the performers' devotion to their task as demonstrated to a capacity audience in Wells Cathedral.

They were greatly assisted by three superb soloists in Jane Irwin, Peter Auty and Darren Jeffery.

Irwin's Angel, borne aloft by the beauty of her mezzo tone, subtlety of phrasing and effort, led the trusting soul of Gerontius to its final destination. Her characterisation, both persuasive and graceful, gave the audience too a feeling of total confidence to follow.

Peter Auty as Gerontius had the Herculean task of the evening.

He warmed to this with changes of emotion that drew us increasingly into sharing his spiritual journey.

Darren Jeffery's role as the Priest was commanding, made possible by the elegance and stature of his voice.

It was an inspired idea to give the semi-chorus and the part of the Angelicals to the clear, precise and bell-like tonal brightness of the Cathedral School Chamber Choir. Although placed within the main chorus, their sound gave them a tonal distinctiveness and, when required, distance that was absolutely correct.

The Oratorio chorus stuck to its task wonderfully throughout.

Despite being at a dynamic disadvantage with the excellent Sarum Orchestra during the chorus of Demons, the fine sound of the Oratorio Society was ever present and, yes, the tenors were the heroes!

One could have wished for greater variation of rubato and dynamics and for this writer some of the tempos were detrimentally slow.

However the power of the drama, especially at points of building a climax, was never compromised and some very vivid and memorable points of the performance remain.

Andrew Maddocks