



A superb performance

Verdi's Requiem, the Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society and the University of the West of England Singers and Symphony Orchestra, Wells Cathedral

Last Saturday, in Wells Cathedral, the combined forces of the Cathedral Oratorio Society and the University of the West of England Singers and Symphony Orchestra - about 300 performers in total - gave a superb account of Verdi's Requiem under the skilful direction of Matthew Owens, the cathedral organist and Master of the Choristers.

A near sell-out audience, evidence of the popularity of this masterpiece, was treated to an unforgettable experience. Rarely can there have been heard such magnificent sounds in this grand space.

From the hushed opening of the work, through the drama of the succeeding movements, to the final resignation of the closing bars, all involved rose to the occasion.

The vast choir impressed with its flexibility and accuracy in the difficult dramatic moments, especially the exultant *Sanctus*, while producing beautiful tone in the more reflective moments of the piece, such as the exposed unaccompanied passage in the *Libera Me*.

The four soloists were of a high standard. Soprano Claire Weston possesses a voice which is well-suited to this most operatic of settings of the Requiem.

Jeffrey Lloyd-Roberts was the exciting tenor who impressed with his ringing delivery, and the bass was Roland Wood, whose warm, rich voice blended well with the other soloists.

The most exciting member of the quartet was mezzo-soprano Jane Irwin, who, with her powerful and rock steady delivery combined with great musicality, was a constant delight.

The orchestra, which included a sprinkling of local players, contributed greatly to the success of the evening. The *Dies Irae* was delivered with splendid attack, with the brass build-up being especially thrilling.

The strings were most expressive, in particular their hushed playing during the *Offertorio*.

Mr Owens guided his forces through a well thought-out interpretation, and provided a sympathetic accompaniment to the soloists. His pacing of the work and his control in the big dramatic moments of the score were exemplary.

This was a performance that will remain long in the memory, and it is to be hoped that similar collaborations will materialise in the near future - the Berlioz Requiem, perhaps?

Brendan Sadler