



Substantial choral items ... with a thrilling climax

Last Saturday in Wells Cathedral the Cathedral Oratorio Society together with Choristers from the Cathedral Choir and Southern Sinfonia Orchestra presented a programme of choral and orchestral music in honour of the Queen's 90th birthday.

In the first half we had two substantial choral items - Parry's setting of Milton's: Blest Pair of Sirens and Elgar's Te Deum and Benedictus together with Walton's Coronation March: Crown Imperial. The Parry, written for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, is a tour de force for any choir. The Oratorio Society produced some fine sustained singing with a thrilling climax to the words "to live with him and sing in endless morn of light". William Walton's 1937 orchestral march Crown Imperial has all the swagger and pomp of Elgar with an equally Elgarian tune in the trio section. Southern Sinfonia with Matthew Owens conducting, gave a lively, polished performance bringing out Walton's jaunty rhythm's and vivid orchestration.

Elgar's setting of the Te Deum and Benedictus ended the first half. Written in 1897 for a Three Choirs Festival the linked works have all the hall marks of the later mature composer with well crafted choral lines and deft orchestration. After the strong opening music for "We praise thee O God" with voices in unison, the middle section introduces a quieter section for "The holy church throughout all the world". This later leads back to the opening music for "Day by day we magnify thee" - the Te Deum ending quietly with "let me never be confounded". The Benedictus is generally more lyrical in feeling and Elgar matches this with gently lilting lines where we had some lovely Soprano singing. The concluding Gloria reprises music from the Te Deum to reach a rousing climax at the Amen. Throughout the chorus sang with good tone and clear words and with plenty of vigour where called for.

Walton's 1953 Coronation March: Orb and Sceptre kicked off the second half of the concert - a virtuoso orchestral work even jazzier and more rhythmically exciting than Crown Imperial. Here the Brass and Percussion have a field day and they took every opportunity to enjoy it - so did the audience who rewarded orchestra and conductor with enthusiastic applause. Parry's stately setting of "I was Glad" followed and once again we had fine, full throated singing from the chorus and with the Cathedral choristers aptly initiating the traditional "Vivat" acclamations sung at Coronations. As an interlude to the general festivities, Nimrod from Elgar's Enigma Variations set a different tone. Written with his friend and music publisher in mind the hushed opening on the strings evokes an almost valedictory feeling, which gradually builds to a huge climax before ending quietly. The Cathedral choristers accompanied by organ alone continued the quieter tone with Parry's beautiful setting of words from the Apocrypha included in his Oratorio "Judith. We know the music with different words as the hymn "Dear Lord and father of mankind". The clear toned singing of the young voices with the low-key organ accompaniment was quite haunting in the middle of the general festive razzmatazz. To round off the evening Matthew Owens turned to the audience and invited everyone to take up their flags and join the chorus and orchestra in the "Last night of the Proms" finale, with Parry's Jerusalem, Elgar's Land of Hope and Glory and finally the National Anthem with its Coronation fanfare by Gordon Jacob. Good-humoured enthusiasm was the order of the day and this most enjoyable concert ended with a rousing encore of Land of Hope and Glory.

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