



...such expressive singing and playing.

Last Saturday the Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society and the period instrument Music for a While Orchestra presented a programme of baroque choral and orchestral masterpieces under the baton of Cathedral Organist and Master of the Choristers, Matthew Owens.

The evening commenced with a performance of Vivaldi's concerto for two violins and strings in A minor, op. 3 in which the excellent soloists were Maggie Faultless (the orchestra's leader) and Henry Tong. This was played with appropriate lightness of touch with a good balance between the parts

Two well-known choral works made up the rest of the programme. These were, firstly, Vivaldi's most popular of his settings of the Gloria and, finally, J. S. Bach's Magnificat, his first setting of a major liturgical Latin text. In both works the choir sang with great spirit, firmness of attack, excellent diction and faithfully followed their conductor's directions. In the slower movements they provided warmth of expression and breadth of phrasing. Particularly memorable in this respect was the Et in terra pax of the Gloria. On occasion, the taxing florid passages could have been a little cleaner. Nevertheless, this did not detract from one's enjoyment overall.

There were five soloists. The two sopranos were Lesley Jane Rogers and Ali Darragh. Their voices were well matched in duet and they both gave excellent accounts of their solos. Tim Wilson, the countertenor, sang with sensitivity but was somewhat lacking in power in the lower register. The tenor, Matthew Minter, made a good impression but, for your reviewer, the most outstanding of the male soloists was the bass, Craig Bissex. His is a rich, clean instrument, which he put to expressive use in the Quia fecet movement of the Magnificat.

The Music for a While Orchestra provided an alert accompaniment. Occasionally, in the spacious acoustics of the cathedral, some detail was lost, especially when the choir was giving of its all. One of the joys of the evening was the magical playing in the Magnificat of the baroque flutes and oboes, which the conductor rightfully acknowledged.

Once again, Matthew Owens deserves credit for overseeing the proceedings and eliciting such expressive singing and playing from his forces.

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