



A most satisfying performance...

There was a large audience in Wells Cathedral for the concert, given last Saturday, by the Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society together with the Southern Sinfonia conducted by Matthew Owens. The programme consisted of two works by Johannes Brahms and one by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

The first item was Brahms' Rhapsody for Alto and male chorus. The orchestral introduction was affectingly played setting the mood of the piece. The soloist was Rachael Lloyd who possesses a warm and vibrant mezzo-soprano voice. She sang with great sensitivity and poise. Where called for, she had the power to be heard over the orchestra without sacrificing quality of tone. In the final section the soloist was joined by the male voices of the choir. Whilst lacking a little in clarity they sang with good tone and with the soloist brought the work to an easeful conclusion.

There followed Vaughan Williams' evocative "The Lark Ascending" which, in a Classic FM poll taken last April, was voted Britain's most popular piece of classical music. The soloist was Thomas Kemp, a name new to your reviewer. He gave a most magical rendering of this ravishing work. His pianissimo playing was breathtaking and he took the technical demands of the piece in his stride. The orchestra provided atmospheric support although one felt that the faster middle section could have been a little more jaunty. So spellbound was the audience that there was neither a cough or rustle to be heard.

The main item of the evening was Brahms' German Requiem. This was given an inspiring performance. The choir distinguished themselves, responding attentively to their conductor's shaping of the phrases. Diction was good and tuning was near faultless. Climaxes were thrilling, especially in the sixth section in which the last trumpet is evoked. The best known section of the work is the fourth, "How lovely are thy dwelling places", which was given a most sympathetic rendering. The baritone soloist in the third and sixth sections was Darren Jefferey who impressed with his firm ringing tone and deliniation of the text. In the third section the soprano soloist was Mhairi Lawson who was standing in for the indisposed Katherine Broderick. She sang with confidence and showed no sign of having being called on at such short notice. This was a most satisfying performance of this powerful work.

Under the excellent direction of Matthew Owens the society continues to go from strength to strength.

Brendan Sadler, November 2014