



## **Entries were firm and diction clear.**

Wells Cathedral was full last Saturday evening for a performance of Handel's ever popular Messiah given by the Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society with Music for Awhile orchestra, on period instruments, and four excellent soloists: Amy Carson, Soprano, Louise Innes, Mezzo Soprano, Paul Phoenix, Tenor and Craig Bissex, Bass. The conductor was Matthew Owens.

This was a performance characterised by crisp tempi and drama with a sense of momentum as one number moved seamlessly into the next to make a coherent whole of the unfolding story.

The Tenor opens the proceedings with comforting words from Isaiah. As was clear with the other soloists Paul Phoenix showed his operatic experience in the ability to put over the dramatic nature of the text. He admirably set the scene for the drama to come. Particularly thrilling was his aria "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron" but there was also poignancy in "Thy rebuke hath broken his heart". Louise Innes with her rich mezzo voice showed considerable agility in "For he is like a refiner's fire" in Part one and later beautifully poised singing in "He was despised and rejected". Amy Carson with a clear, high soprano voice portrayed the excitement and anticipation in the Christmas sections of Part One and in the aria "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion". Particularly affecting was her performance of "I know that my redeemer liveth" at the start of Part Three. Complementing the other three soloists was the excellent Bass Craig Bissex. He produced some thrilling moments from his opening recitative "Thus saith the Lord" to the dramatic "Why do the nations so furiously rage together".

Throughout the chorus sang with confidence, coping admirably with the tempos set by the conductor - particularly in Handel's demanding runs. Entries were firm and diction clear. The Sopranos produced some thrilling sounds at the top of their range and all voices produced a resounding "Hallelujah" chorus only topped by the final Amen chorus. The singing from the choir was always agile but well controlled.

The performance was supported by the specialist orchestra Music for Awhile playing on period instruments who played with style and vigour led by Maggie Faultless. Matthew Owens, the conductor, produced a fine performance of this great oratorio fittingly greeted with much applause from the audience.

David Nichols