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For their spring concert, the Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society together with the Southern Sinfonia under Matthew Owens, presented a programme comprising both choral and orchestral works.

The first item was Aaron Copland's ballet suite, "Appalachian Spring". From the atmospheric opening to the serene conclusion the orchestra impressed with its response to the conductor's direction. In particular, the changes of mood and the rhythmic complexities were well negotiated. The closing pages of the score were quite affecting.

Leonard Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms", written for the 1965 Chichester Festival, has echoes of his teacher, Aaron Copland. It makes considerable demands on both choir and orchestra and both acquitted themselves well. Following a firm start, the dance rhythms of the first movement could have been enunciated a little more crisply. In the second movement there was a distinguished solo by Alexi James-Cudworth, one of the cathedral choristers, and some warmth of tone from the chorus. The contrasting central section was despatched with vigour. The final movement was brought to a hushed conclusion. The short solo passages were well taken by Ali Darragh (soprano), Alastair Forbes (alto), Oliver Chubb (tenor) and Harry Guthrie (bass).

The second half of the programme began with a resplendent performance by the brass and percussion sections of the orchestra of Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man", the acoustics of the cathedral proving ideal for such fulsome sounds.

By way of contrast the strings performed Samuel Barber's popular Adagio. This was most sensitively phrased and beautifully controlled up to a powerful climax. The final bars were quite moving.

The concert concluded with John Rutter's "Gloria". There were strong echoes of William Walton in the opening brass introduction and also his choral writing in the many syncopated passages. Both choir and orchestra coped well with the intricacies of the score. The choir sang with good attack where required although, on occasion, the male members sounded a little tentative. In Part II, the woodwind distinguished themselves in their birdsong-like passages and the choir rose to the occasion at the climax which was followed by some lovely soft singing. Part III was joyously performed and the piece was brought to a blazing conclusion.

This would be a taxing programme for any conductor and Matthew Owens steered his forces through all the complexities of the scores with his usual skill and musicianship.

Brendan Sadler