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In their concert at Wells Cathedral last Saturday [10th November], the Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society under the direction of Matthew Owens, Organist and Master of the Choristers, was joined by the prestigious London Mozart Players which recently celebrated its seventieth anniversary.

To mark the centenary of the 1918 Armistice, the main work in the programme was a performance of Jonathan Dove's cantata "For an Unknown Soldier". Composed in 2014, it consists of settings of poems written during the first world war, covering various aspects of the conflict from initial enthusiasm through the horrors of the trenches to a final expression of hideous loss.

The work is in nine sections and makes great demand of the performers. The choir rose to the occasion, responding well to the changing moods of the texts. There were one or two occasions when, due to the challenging choral writing, the ensemble was not as tight as it might have been. However, overall, this was most moving experience. In the space available it is not possible to consider each section in detail but, particularly memorable was "Before Action" where the poet prays for courage on the eve of battle. This features a solo tenor, in this instance, Thomas Elwyn, who sang with power and warmth and responded well to the text, as he did throughout the whole performance. "Dead Man's Dump" graphically describes the scene of battle. The forces combined to make a terrifying impact which still remains in the mind. The final section, "An Imperial Elegy" brought the piece to a heart-rending conclusion. Mention must also be made of the excellent contribution made by the boy and girl choristers. Matthew Owens steered his forces through this demanding work with consummate skill. The composer, Jonathan Dove, was present and must have been gratified to hear his work presented with such conviction.

The other work in the programme was the much loved Requiem by Gabrielle Fauré. This came as balm after after the anguish of the first half. It was performed in Fauré's original version with chamber orchestra and organ. This was a warm, lyrical reading. There was some very expressive phrasing and a lovely blend between the voices. The "Pie Jesu" was sung with affecting simplicity by treble, Ross Lloyd, Head Boy Chorister. The Baritone soloist was Henry Waddington. His is a rich, resonant voice and he delivered a fine rendition of the Libera Me. This was taken at a faster tempo than is usually the case which made the powerful interjection by the choir all the more telling. A beautiful "In Paradisum" brought brought the evening to a consoling conclusion.

The playing of the London Mozart Players came fully up to expectations and contributed greatly to to the success of the evening.

Brendan Sadler