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For its Easter performance this year Wells Cathedral Oratorio Society under its inspirational Musical Director Matthew Owens chose Mendelssohn's oratorio Elijah, long a favourite of British audiences since its premiere in Birmingham in 1846 shortly before the composer's premature death.

The orchestra this time was the English Symphony Orchestra, based in Worcester and led by Zoe Beyers, which provided a superbly expressive rock on which Mr Owens built his epic interpretation of this wonderful work, complemented by the excellent Matthew Redman at the Cathedral organ.

The conductor had chosen a stellar array of soloists, Elizabeth Atherton (soprano), Katie Bray (mezzo-soprano), Peter Auty (tenor) and Ben McAteer (bass), and each sang with huge commitment and stunning vocal quality, blending beautifully with consummate musicianship when necessary. Each proved a faultless interpreter of the many familiar recitatives and solos.

Mr McAteer as Elijah was by turns imperious, defiant and vulnerable, bringing a palpable warmth of humanity to this huge role. Although it seldom fails to prove affecting, his aria It is Enough, with a moving cello solo by Corinne Frost, was on this occasion particularly heartrending.

Ms Atherton's silvery soprano also provided many memorable moments, once even when she was silent as the Widow whose son Elijah resurrects, where the pain in her face as Elijah ministered showed her total immersion in the role.

Ms Bray proved completely compassionate as The Angel, but added a menacing edge to her voice as she portrayed the evil Queen Jezebel.

Mr Auty, as Elijah's disciple Obadiah, met his many challenges with liquid intensity. Many tenors have If With All Your Hearts as their party-piece, but most would love to sing it as beautifully as it was rendered here.

It was exciting to hear the Oratorio Society so responsive, incisive and dynamic. Each section distinguished itself and many of the heaven-scaling choruses threatened to bring down the majestic scissor-arches of the Cathedral.

Sopranos were unfailingly accurate in their tuning, altos confident if a little muted at times, tenors and basses firm and committed. Lift Thine Eyes, sung by three invisible Angels, was suitably ethereal.

If there has to be one quibble, it would be that a few piano and pianissimo moments, including the magical arrival of the Voice of God, might have been still quieter.

However, this was a truly magnificent evening, and one fervently hopes that the Society is celebrated by its customary full Cathedral for the adventurous November programme, which comprises works by Arvo Part and Morten Lauridsen.

Hywel Jenkins