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It was gratifying to see the Cathedral much fuller for the Oratorio Society's November concert than it had been for Elijah in March. This time the distinguished orchestra was the English Chamber Orchestra led by John Mills, and the entire production was under the direction of Jeremy Cole.

The ECO strings, augmented by a single bell, began the evening with Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten by the living Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, written in early 1977 shortly after Britten's passing. The work, in Pärt's characteristic tintinnabuli ('little bells') style, builds to a powerful conclusion and a final bell-stroke disappearing into nothing. It proved to be a perfect opener for the evening, the dense string textures resonating movingly round the Cathedral's massive acoustic.

The choral work before the interval was the American composer Morten Lauridsen's five-movement Lux Aeterna (Eternal Light), written in 1997 following the death of his mother. Using Latin texts from various sources, this work, like the Pärt, presents an extraordinarily concentrated impression using relatively simple resources.

The choir, perhaps larger than for most performances of both this work and the Rutter later, nevertheless balanced well the gentle dissonances of the opening Introitus and the Gregorian echoes of In Te, Domine, Speravi (Lord, I have hoped in You), each section negotiating its challenges confidently, with focused tone. The central O Nata Lux (O Light born from Light), beautifully realised the *molto espressivo* instruction in the score, the choir achieving an affecting *pianissimo* at the start and maintaining true intonation during the unaccompanied passages. After the calm of these three movements, which would return for the final Agnus Dei-Lux Aeterna, the rustle of vitality which shot through the choir for the exuberant Veni Sancte Spiritus was impressive.

John Rutter's Magnificat, celebrating the Annunciation, was written in 1990, and over the seven movements its many attractive moods, ranging from exhilaration in the opening Magnificat, through lyrical contemplation in Of a Rose, to the muscular, almost subversive Fecit Potentiam (He hath shown strength), give both choir and orchestra an exciting test of agility. All rose beautifully despite a slightly unclear choral entry here and there, and the overall impression was that all performers were having enormous fun. John Rutter is the Society's Patron, and no doubt the choir will relish his visit next May to direct a Come-and-Sing Day.

In the Rutter the soprano Elizabeth Atherton delivered her main solos, Et Misericordia (And his Mercy) and Esurientes (He hath filled the hungry), with wonderful freshness of tone and accuracy of intonation – a complete delight.

Jeremy Cole had plainly trained the choir well, and throughout the evening directed both choir and orchestra clearly and unfussily. We shall look forward to his Messiah on 7th December with the Society and hope that he perhaps receives the nod as permanent conductor for next season.