

The Choral Society's *Messiah* for Christmas

Doncaster Choral Society performs Handel's *Messiah* every other December (although we shall not forget it is a work for all seasons) and it is good that it does so as *Messiahs* are noticeably less frequent in the town than in my young day. This is a pity as it is a work so firmly embedded in the culture of this country. It is unique, even in Handel's oratorio corpus. A recent attempt to stage it seems to me ludicrously misconceived and sentimental, almost tacky – an ego trip for those primarily responsible.

Fortunately no such considerations arose in this year's Choral Society reading given to a capacity audience at Priory on 12 December, which was eminently sound, reliable and well rehearsed under Alan East's thoughtful direction; the choir wisely kept back something for the final numbers – did Handel ever compose a finer chorus than the "Amen"? This *Messiah* was presented, generally speaking, with what used to be regarded as "the usual cuts", though the aria "If God be for us" was included, happily giving the Wakefield soprano Sarah Redgwick's admirably clear delivery more exposure.

The other soloists, too, contributed much to the overall result. Tenor Christopher Clements was singing at short notice, but I enjoyed his confident, incisive stylish work and contralto Katherine Allen, a keen Handelian, brought Welsh passion to her role. Most memorable for many was the bass, Australian-born Simon Lobelson, who delivered his solos with pulsating warmth, vigour and originality. We will hear more of him.

Instrumental support came from Ron Law at the Priory organ and Doncaster's own Boyce Chamber Orchestra who supplied a very competent account of Handel's score. Dave Tonkin was the confident spine-tingling trumpet soloist; leader Susan King played the accompaniment of "If God be for us" as a violin obbligato and effectively so – interesting to have two "obbligato arias" side by side.

Orpheus