

‘ELIJAH’ Review

Bedford Corn Exchange - Saturday, November 14th 2009

What an enjoyable evening this proved to be! A full house and a chorus restored to something nearer the desired strength, after the very thin turn-out in June, and a chance to savour Mendelssohn’s genius in this anniversary year. He has come in for some condescending criticism in some quarters; personally I find that a composer who could produce works like the Violin Concerto, the 3rd and 4th symphonies, Midsummer Night’s dream, the String Octet, vast quantities of chamber music, and a work like ‘Elijah’ (and much else), has got to be pretty good. The range of emotions covered by such movements as “Be not afraid” (especially the fugal section), “Woe to him”, “Behold, The Lord God passed by” or the heart-rending aria with cello “It is enough”, is impressive. I found “O rest in the Lord”, very moving, perhaps having played it so often at funerals, it was a new experience to hear it live, performed as the composer scored it, and at a comfortable pace, not too slow.

Bedford Choral Society sang ‘Elijah’ in 1990, 1979 and 1969. The 1979 performance was directed by David Willcocks, and some of us recall his rather despairing comment at the Monday rehearsal in the concert week, “It’s supposed to be a *dramatic* work!” I like to think we injected a little more drama on the Saturday. Ian’s reading of the work certainly did not lack that quality and this was reflected in the singing.

Well done choir! Whether it was mocking the ineffectual Baal, or celebrating Jehovah’s triumphs over his enemies, or the Ladies’ beautiful rendering of “Lift thine eyes”, you delivered the goods.

Orchestral balance? I was perched up in the very top corner of the balcony (chosen because it was next to a permanently illuminated sign to the loos, enabling me to keep an eye on my vocal score); I found the balance fine, though of course, when you are on the platform, it may be a different matter. As ever, you were well served by orchestra and soloists; Ian, in my humble opinion, was entitled to go home a happy man.

Ken Laflin

November 18th 2009