

Choral society's Messiah

is revelation

Nov. '79

HANDEL'S Messiah seemed to be a particularly suitable work to perform for Armistice Sunday when the Nation remembered its dead of two world-wars, for its affirmation of hope and comfort has uplifted countless generations.

Our thoughts were also directed to the approaching Christmas in the sublime account of the birth of the Child at Bethlehem, for, surely, Handel's Messiah must rank as the

oratorio for all seasons as it encompasses the whole liturgical year, covering every phase of the life of Christ.

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society's performance

Music

under their conductor and musical director, Derek Watmough, was a revelation. It brought out the spiritual quality

and character of the work which, shorn of the heavy Victorian overlay of orchestration, allowed the textures to shine through brightly. The work was heard in almost its entirety, with all the usual cuts restored.

The singing of the choir which looked serene and dignified in black relieved only by red poppies, was well-balanced and beautifully rounded and clear in intonation and dynamics. The orchestra, led by Jane Pamment, with Anthony Smith-Master harpsichord-continuo and John Hammonds trumpet, played excellently.

Special demands were made of the solo singers in the Baroque period in which Handel lived, for they were expected to embellish their recitatives and arias with ornamentation requiring great vocal agility. Just how graceful this sounded as admirably shown by the outstandingly good soloists especially Jaquelyn Fugelle, whose pure, bell-like soprano voice floated effortlessly across the hall, also by the stylish and richly expressive and moving singing of tenor Anthony Attwell and the splendidly resonant bass William Shimell, whose rendering of The Trumpet Shall Sound was indeed a clarion call.

Gwyneth Griffiths, contralto, though she sang with a fine sense of line and timbre, lacked the power and clarity of diction of the others.

MARLIS EVANS