

A FEAST OF MUSIC INDEED

IN THE PRESENCE of the Mayor and her escort, the Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society under their principal conductor Derek Watmough gave a rare treat to a discerning, if disappointingly small, audience at the Assembly Hall on Sunday.

Perhaps the choice of Alexander's *Feast* deterred some who are reluctant to stray from the well-trodden *Messiah* / *Elijah* / *Gerontius* path. A pity if this is so, because there are so many other choral works which deserve an airing, of which this secular oratorio by Handel is undoubtedly one.

The society was well served by its three soloists. Adrian Thompson performed the demanding tenor part with authority. The important recitatives, on which so much of Dryden's narrative rests, were sung with style and distinction, while in the arias this fine singer produced an evenness of tone throughout the whole of his considerable range.

TONAL PURITY

High praise is also due to Jacqueline Fugelle, who (despite the programme note) has also appeared with the Choral Society on previous occasions. Her purity of tone and line were shown to full effect, while the security of her technique made all those Handelian flourishes sound effortless — which they most certainly are not.

The baritone had rather less work to do, but John Hancorn brought a fine bravure to the drinking song, and his performance of the strenuous *Revenge*, *Revenge* was equally memorable.

All this splendid singing was matched by the choir, whose accuracy of attack, attention to dynamic markings (doubtless under the watchful eye of their conductor) and clarity of diction set high standards.

SOLO WORK

Under the capable leadership of Jane Pamment the orchestra also made an important contribution to the success of this concert. There was some outstanding solo work, especially in the cello section, and I was struck by how well Handelian forces sound in the Assembly Hall. The continuo from Wilmarc Ellman at the harpsichord was discreet and musicianly.

Alexander's *Feast* was an experience I was very glad not to have missed. Music did, indeed, win the cause: would that more people had been there to enjoy its triumph with me.

ROBERT HARDCASTLE