

# Bach — composer for all seasons

**IN ATTENDING any of the myriad concerts which mark J. S. Bach's 300th anniversary it is impossible not to wonder anew at the amazing influence of this provincial German organist who, in his own time, was so little valued as a composer.**

The performance by the Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society's performance in the Assembly Hall, of his Passion according to Saint John took place in conditions and in a culture far removed from that of St Thomas, Leipzig.

And yet, as always, the genius of its creator, shone through. Truly, Bach is a composer for all seasons.

Admittedly there were some sharp stylistic contrasts. The restrained and impersonal narration of the Evangelist, finely sung by Michael Goldthorpe, belonged to the modern "German" tradition of interpreting Bach, whereas the Chorus's careful underlining of each sentiment in the Chorales seemed to be the product of the "Elgar-Atkins-English-romantic" aspect.

That both these attitudes are, in performance, equally valid proves, yet again, how universal and undenominational is Bach's religious music.

Derek Watmough elicited fine singing from his chorus and they made most impact in those sections where the music had been memorised and where they could be a real "turba", acting with their faces as well as their voices.

Only in the first Chorus, where there should be a portrayal of "... and Lo! a Great Multitude, which no man can number" was there any uncertainty. Outstanding were the 'Crucify!' choruses and many of the chorales and the final "Lie still," in particular, showed the choir in really fine form.

This work is, essentially music drama, and if, as on this occasion, the characters of the Evangelist and Christus, sung with great authority by Jonathan Roberts, receive a detached interpretation, it is vital that the contemplative Arias re-establish humanity and personal contact. This, unfortunately, did not always happen.

The best of the three soloists was Susan Mason, whose all is Fulfilled, provided a highlight of the second half. Neither Alan Duffield, tenor, nor Jill Washington, soprano, could project their words beyond the orchestra and, indeed, the latter seemed to be sightreading and made no contact at all with the audience.

Given the present malaise of bad diction affecting far too many of our opera singers, the audience could have done with the full text in their hands to aid their comprehensive and enjoyment.

The competent orchestra was ably led by Jane Pamment and many of the 'obbligati' beautifully played. In particular, the 'cello in My Lord and Saviour, was outstanding. Willmarc Ellman, playing harpsichord, accomplished the difficult task of providing a flexible continuo for the soloists.

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