

Mendelssohn's Elijah

In times past Mendelssohn's oratorio Elijah was an often sung favourite with choirs and choral societies but in recent years its performances have been much more limited and as a piece is unknown to many. At their spring concert in the Parish Church Dunbar Choral, with guest soloists and a small orchestra, gave an outstanding performance of the dramatic and melodic music of the work that would suggest it deserves to be in more programmes. Conductor and Musical Director, Alberto Massimo, produced a balanced and effective performance that throughout did justice to singers and instrumentalists and was much enjoyed by an appreciative audience.

The work starts unusually with a short opening sung by the baritone soloist as Elijah. Paul Grant filled this demanding role for the evening with power, panache and musical excellence. After the introduction the orchestra, with leader Kathy Garrison, played the overture to a high standard that was maintained throughout the evening. Thereafter the oratorio unfolded parts of the biblical story of Elijah, with contributions from two other soloists. Tenor Kit Hobkirk sang the roles of Obadiah, a friend of Elijah, King Ahab and an angel with clarity, skill and the range required to fill the parts. Soprano Olivia Massimo brought colour and life to the parts of a youth and a widow with whom Elijah found lodging. Olivia's musicality and vivacious voice brought much to the evening.

Clever distribution to sections or groups of the choir of parts of the work, sung originally by duets, trios or the like, helped maintain a real balance between singers and orchestra. Sensitive organ accompaniment by Carlo Massimo gave added strength and depth. It was an ambitious undertaking for the Choral after the long covid forced break but the result was well worth the effort and hard work that lay behind the performance. The melodies which marked much of the work sent many away with ear worms ringing in their heads. It should be a matter of some right pride for all concerned that such an enlightening and enjoyable evening could be produced in Dunbar.

John Cairns