



Kingdom is a fitting farewell tribute

AFTER his memorable performance of the Dream of Gerontius two years ago, a great deal was expected of The Kingdom, which William Llewellyn had chosen for his farewell to the Festival.

It is a far more difficult work to bring off successfully, but listening to the impassioned opening bars of the Overture, the audience sensed that they were in for something special.

The playing of the Southampton Youth Orchestra

The Kingdom Saturday

(pictured above in rehearsal with the choirs) was a revelation, resplendent and lucid in turn.

The very presence of these young players – nearly 80 of them packing the front of the Hall – inspired the Festival Chorus to sing above themselves, producing moments of grandeur and exhilaration, marred only by the sag-

ging pitch at the of “O ye priests” and some ill-focusing male voices.

The soloists, too, were excellent, led by Mark Wildman as Peter, who lent gravity and authority to his solo “Ye men of Israel” as well as producing beautiful dreamy tone when required.

Jill-Maria Marsden, the soprano, had the best-known solo, “The sun goeth down,” and one top note apart, took her great opportunity well.

Her words were unclear at

times, something highlighting in the duet for the two Marys, in which Emily Bauer-Jones was the more intense singer.

Mark le Brocq as St John completed a gratifyingly involved quartet.

The Kingdom has its critics, but William Llewellyn’s obvious love of the work, and his skill in shaping and pacing it, did much to silence them.

His performance was dedicated to the memory of John Clark, and was a fitting tribute.

Service

IT was the turn of the Methodist Church to host this year’s Festival Service, and the large congregation received a warm welcome from the Minister, the Reverend Donald Symonds, who also gave the address. The special choir was drawn from members of the Festival Chorus, and directed by the organist, Philip Richards.

Going bananas with the Demon Barbers

HAVE you ever seen a straight banana? No, nor had the Demons, as they told us in their zany, Goon-like encore at the end of Friday’s concert-with-a-difference.

Other crazy gems were The Blue Danube played on a teapot, and a wicket parody of Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Suicide’s Grave by the rubber-faced Anthony Scales, who also improvised a jazz interlude with his twin brother Robert. But these were merely interludes

The Demon Barbers Friday

in a riveting display of vocals complete with fat tenor and giant bass. Their thrilling patter (Dry Bones, Mr Bassman and Old Mother Hubbard) belied what were in reality five very fine voices.

Jeremy Birchall in Old Man River, Andrew Phillips in All the Time,

even the crazy Mr Scales in Danny Boy: they all sang like angels when required but it was their staggering feats of memory that amazed me most.

Goodness knows just how many notes and how many words they fitted into their generous concert. Music and text had equal clarity and drew peals of laughter from the audience.

Ann Penhew in Petersfield Herald,

Herald 24 March

Saturday: Gentle and dignified Elgar makes a fitting farewell

THE gentle falling chords which close Elgar's *The Kingdom* signal the end, not only of that work and all his religious music, but also of William Llewellyn's reign as conductor of the Petersfield Musical Festival.

It was his wish to say goodbye with *The Kingdom*, a work considered by his greatest predecessor, Sir Adrian Boult, as superior to *The Dream of Gerontius*, but portrayed in less flattering terms by Michael Hurd in the programme book.

I suspect that Michael Hurd's view is correct. Elgar's religious conviction shines all through

Gerontius, but by *The Kingdom* he admitted that material matters, particularly money, were of greater importance to him, and the spark of inspiration shines less brightly.

Yet the work can have no finer advocate than William Llewellyn, who directed the Festival Chorus and the Southampton Youth orchestra in a searing performance.

Much of its success was due to the four distinguished soloists, sensibly placed high above the orchestra.

Jill-Maria Marsden sang her great scena "The sun goeth down" with operatic opulence and conviction, while the bass, Mark

Wildman, displayed a Wotan-like resolve in all his music

with a voice to match. Emily Bauer-Jones was emotionally involved as the Magdalene, singing with great intensity in the duet on the Morn of Pentecost. Marc le Brocq, an outstanding singer in early music, sounded hard-pressed at times, but completed an excellently balanced quartet.

The Chorus (Horndean, Petersfield and Rogate Choral Societies) was let down by its tenors and basses, who portrayed a feeble set of disciples.

The ladies sang out splendidly, nowhere more than in the inspiring invitation to Baptism, where Mr Wildman was also superb. The burnished sound of the brass was particularly evocative of Wagner's "Parsifal", the inspiration of Elgar's musical idiom, and the climax of *The Kingdom*.

The ambivalent setting of the Lord's Prayer at the end is, for me, quite unconvincing.

Vibrant spontaneity

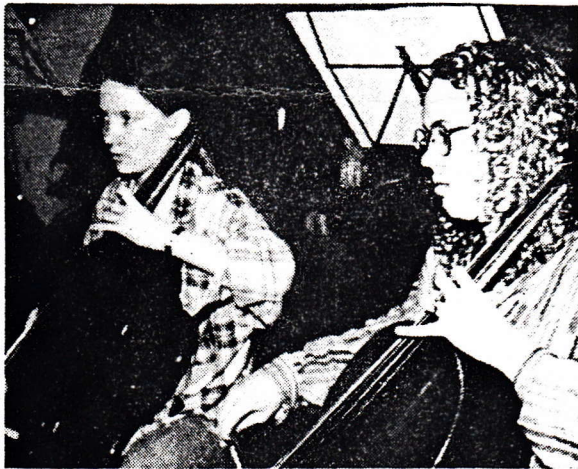
It was with the playing of the Southampton Youth Orchestra that the real success of the performance lay. It may not have been perfect, but it had a vibrance and youthful spontaneity which created sounds the like of which we have not heard in this hall before.

William Llewellyn could have done nothing better with which to say farewell to the festival.

He took over at a difficult time, and three of his performances stand out. Verdi's *Requiem*, *The Dream of Gerontius* and *this Kingdom*.

All three were composed in a space of 30 years, which tells us much about his musical preferences, and proved that he is a man for the really big occasion. We all wish him a happy retirement.

Let us hope that his successor, Robin Wells, has the charisma to attract badly needed new singers to the choirs, and that by insisting on correct breathing and articulation he can produce a lighter tone than we have experienced in some baroque and classical works performed recently. I am convinced that it is possible.



Utter concentration needed to come in just right