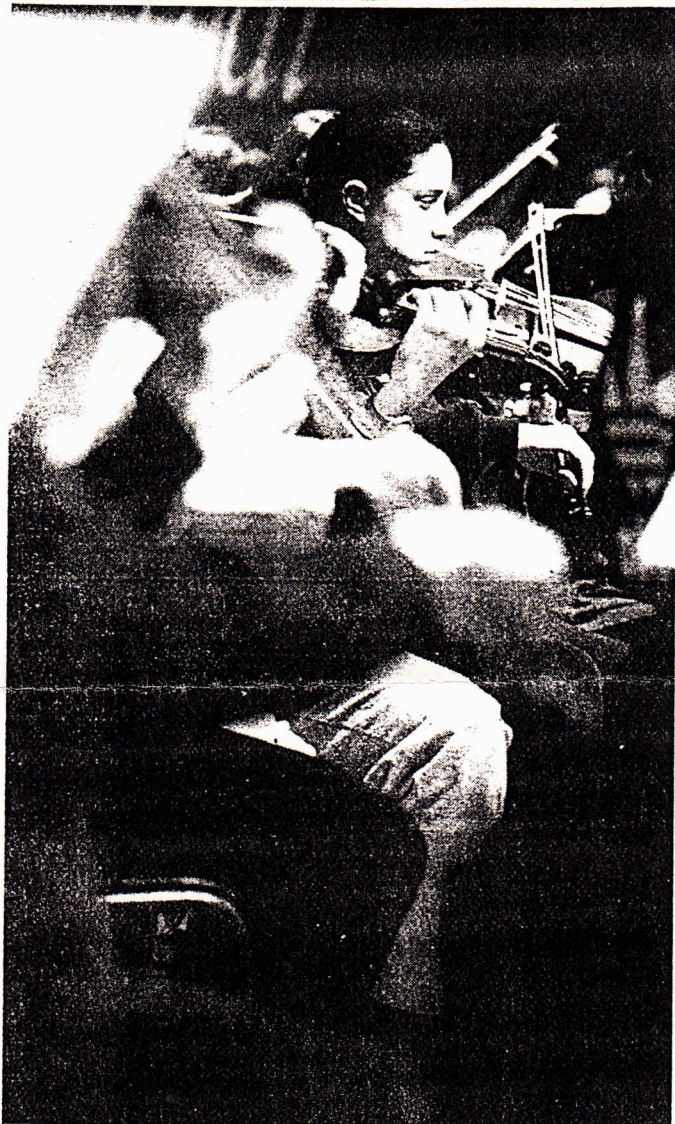


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Oratorio proves to be fiery finale

Elijah seems to have become something of a rarity these days.

It is the last of the great Victorian oratorios to hold its place in the repertory and has the reputation of being sentimental.

True, it does begin to drag towards the end, but what a dramatic tale it tells, and what burning conviction there is, especially in the first part, with Elijah himself emerging as a real character - impetuous, despairing and yet tender.

Saturday's performance at the Festival Hall was in many ways very exciting.

Robin Wells had the festival chorus singing as if their lives depended upon it - fiery and exciting right from the start, with firm tone and excellent balance.

If only he could persuade them to sing softly once in a while.

The Southampton Youth Orchestra surpassed itself, earning a special ovation as the players left their places at the end.

The urgent tone of the violins depicting the rushing waters at the end of the first part added much to the excitement of this great chorus, and their sumptuous tone ensured that the singers had to give their all throughout.

Michael Pearce was an experience and convincing Elijah, while the soprano, Benedikte Moes, a last-minute replacement, deserves our thanks for saving the performance, but it cannot be said that she sounded very comfortable.

That aside, this was a splendid performance that brought the festival to an end on a high note.

Chiches

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● The Southampton Youth Orchestra rehearse for their performance of *Elijah* at Petersfield Music Festival

The Canticles were sung to Sumsion in A.

Demanding Elijah takes its toll on performers and audience

I WONDER how many times that old war-horse, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, has been given at the Petersfield Music Festival?

For a hundred years it was the bread and butter of such events, and even if it has gone out of fashion a bit nowadays, it never fails to bring out the best in choirs or bring the roof down.

Yet it seemed to me that the applause at the end of Saturday's performance was unfairly muted. Perhaps the audience was as exhausted as the performers.

Festival Chorus and the Southampton Youth Orchestra were on their toes throughout, urging them on to ever greater intensity during the great Baal choruses and vividly depicting the stormy billows and rushing waters which make the conclusion of Part One so exciting.

The Festival Chorus (Alton, Hordean, Petersfield and Rogate Choral Societies) sounded far more assured and better balanced than their counterparts in Haydn's *Harmoniemesse* had last week, and they obviously relished the sheer joy of singing Mendelssohn's wonderful music.

ed far happier in the great Baal choruses than in the delicate *For He shall give His Angels charge over Thee*, and the Angels themselves sounded distinctly mature!

Michael Pearce encompassed every facet of *Elijah*'s complex character with assurance.

If his tone sounded slightly dry, this helped to convey the weary desperation of the Prophet.

Yet there was no lack of vehemence in *Is not His Word like a Fire*, and as much as anybody, he helped give a dramatic aspect to the performance.

The soprano soloist, Benedikte Moes, was a last-

minute replacement, and I have to say that I found her voice hard and unsteady; suitably desperate for the widow perhaps, but entirely unsuited to the Youth.

Emily Bauer-Jones displayed a flowing legato and sincere, unaffected tone in both her arias, whilst the refined tenor, Derek Archer, was quite convincing in the gentler sections of his music, but his voice cracked several times under pressure.

The Southampton Youth Orchestra added much to the success of the performance, resplendent in tone in the huge choruses, yet providing some deft touches in the arias.

One is amazed at their resilience and stamina, when one considers that they had already had five hours rehearsal before beginning the performance!

□ My festival highlights? Singing in the Lamb and the rejoice of Claire Seaton and James Oxley in the opening concert; Arvo Part's *Cantus at the Youth Concert*; Lucy Gould playing Sibelius and Julian Bream's *Recital*, of course; and good old *Elijah*, which never fails, but was the best thing Robin Wells has yet done at the Festival