

# A brilliant performance

In some pieces of music there is one outstanding factor upon which the success of the whole depends. Such a work is the Messiah. Here everything is subservient to the Choral singing. If this goes well the evening is more than half way assured of success.

In last night's performance at the City Hall the Combined Christian Choir did not merely sing well—they were brilliant. Their clarity, balance, tone and precision were quite outstanding.

Without the slightest doubt this was the most exciting and successful performance from purely local talent that I have heard in Hongkong.

Particularly impressive was their flexibility. For instance in that Trio of connected Choruses "Surely he hath born," "And with his stripes" and "All we like sheep," they produced a variety of expression and feeling which made each one a distinctive contribution on its own.

In those thunderous climaxes such as "The Hallelujah Chorus," "For unto us," "Worthy is the lamb" to name but three, the sound builds up in great monolithic blocks like the granite pillars of some massive temple.

Last night they came over with spine-tingling power and sense of drama. Nothing was missing. They were magnificent.

To praise the Choir is to praise Professor Chao Mei-pa. The results mark him out as a Choir-Master of quite exceptional ability.

Throughout he conducted with attack precision and complete understanding. Owing to the lack of directives in the score Handel's music calls repeatedly for personal decisions by the Conductor.

It is a measure of Professor Chao's skill that his tempi were never once at fault.

The Hongkong Philharmonic supported well. The choice of Mozart's scoring for a small Orchestra was a wise one.

In a group of instrument-

alists who must rely almost entirely on amateurs each additional player is an extra uncertainty, an added problem.

But quite apart from this the choice was aesthetically preferable. The Mozart score is a miracle of restraint and good taste. It gives exactly the right balance required.

Seldom obtrusive, with just the occasional touch of colour from woodwind and trumpet, and the occasional weight of sound from the timpani, it is an accompaniment which allows the emphasis to stay with the Choral and Solo voice parts. This is as it should be.

The Soloists were no more than average. For sustained performance and overall results Miss Barbara Fei (soprano) gave the best account.

Her well rehearsed and beautifully simple version of "I know that my Redeemer liveth" was excellent. Throughout the evening her diction was admirably clear.

However, in the top registers, she still tends to produce a vibrato effect and distortion which spoils the total result.

All that Walter Wan lacks is the necessary power. A pity because otherwise he has a rich tone and a true bass voice which never falters or slurs on the note.

Beryl Fairey (contralto) was far from her best. She was noticeably hoarse and, once or twice, flat. Her breath control produced some ungainly results on more than one occasion.

Peter Scales (tenor) started very badly. Like Miss Fei his weakness is on the top notes but it is very much more pronounced. This is

probably because he is not a true tenor. In the second part, where the solos call for more weight and dramatic presentation he was considerably more successful.

Is the very important aria "Thou shalt break them," where the building climax towards the following Hallelujah Chorus can so easily be let down, he was at his best, (though there was a tendency to overdo it and shout).

Two closing points. The solo trumpet needs more practice for "The Trumpet shall sound," some bad faltering here. Once or twice the Altos needed more volume, the only slight blemish on an otherwise spotless Choral record.

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