

NEWS

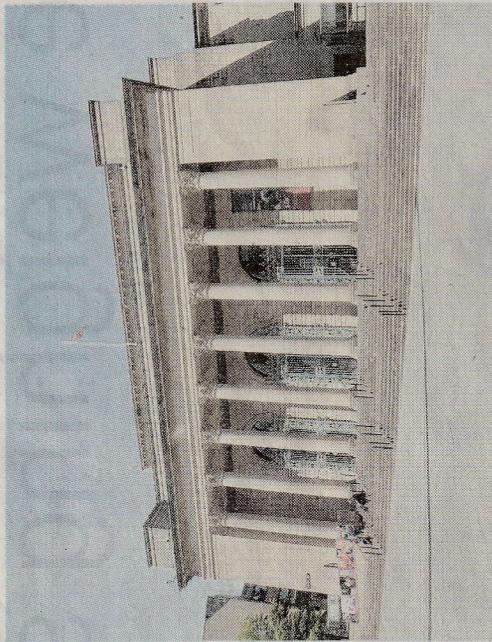
Messiah goes full Yorkshire

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Handel's oratorio on the life of Christ is one of the best-known and best-loved of choral works, and is usually performed by choir, soloists and a small period orchestra – with a couple of trumpets to the fore.

But here Messiah was given the full Yorkshire treatment, with the 150-strong Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus joining forces with regular collaborators, the Black Dyke Band.

That sort of beefy backing gives the work's two best-known choruses – the Alleluia and the Amen – extra clout and resonance, but even a choir of that size can sometimes be difficult to hear behind a con- stant, brassy wall of sound, no



Sheffield City Hall

matter how sensitively and skilfully guided by the baton of conductor Darius Battiwalla.

So it was perhaps as well that the Sheffield forces were

supplemented by members of the Philharmonischer Chor, from Sheffield's German twin city, Bochum, as well as Ensemble Vocal Perigueux, from

south-west France.

For the soloists, competing with the band was a tough call at times, especially for those in the lower registers (bass James Geidt and contralto Margaret McDonald).

The other drawback of constant brass accompaniment is that it diminishes the effectiveness of what should be the most memorable moments of this piece, when Handel introduces single trumpets to give added sparkle to choruses like Glory to God and the bass's parting aria, The Trumpet Shall Sound.

That said, this was a professional and enjoyable performance from the city's leading vocal ensemble, the band and the four impressive soloists, who also included Catrin Pryce-Jones (soprano) and Richard Rowe (tenor).



Darius Battiwalla