

**Review of Elgar's *The Kingdom*
Hertfordshire Chorus, Forest Philharmonic Orchestra
Conductor – David Temple**

This work is a sequel to “The Apostles”, published in 1906, the second part of a triptych that Elgar did not complete.

Hertfordshire Chorus rarely disappoints, is often at its best in such large works and was well rehearsed and on top form; disciplined and controlled in louder sections, with excellent ensemble and good balance and intonation.

Words, always a problem in this acoustic, were sometimes lost, but in quieter sections diction was excellent, the mystic chorus simply superb with wonderful bell-like high sopranos, and elsewhere, neat and light singing from the men.

Naomi Harvey (soprano) was also at her best in the more reflective sections but occasionally had difficulty rising above the orchestra, and whilst the content of the mezzo-soprano part does not hold as much interest, Julia Batchelor-Walsh sang with musicality and vigour.

Particularly impressive were Alan Oke (tenor) and Peter Savidge (bass). The duo section in “The Sign of Healing” was for me the high point of the evening; emotional, impassioned and intense. Peter Savidge was outstanding throughout with seemingly effortless control and stamina and a full, warm, even sound in all registers.

The Orchestra was secure; some blemishes in clarity and intonation in the woodwind; but a lush string sound, fine solo violin from leader Julia Watkins, and the horns and lower brass particularly producing quality and range of colour.

The opening prologue, almost a tone-poem in its own right, was a chance to see David Temple work with the orchestra alone, demonstrating control and clear musical intent. On occasion later he had to work harder to produce changes of pace and dynamic but they were always forthcoming and displayed clearly his vision of the work. Performance without an interval added cohesion, strength to the narrative and the feeling of musical continuity

A great shame the Abbey was not full, we are fortunate to have music of this calibre in Hertfordshire.

Steve Jenner

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