

## Dream of Gerontius

An unforgettable concert was given on 24<sup>th</sup> October in Worthing Assemble Hall, by Arun Choral Society and Sinfonia of Arun, conducted by John Henville.

The dream of Gerontius was first performed on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1900 in Birmingham, to words by Cardinal Newman (recently beatified by the Pope). The poem tells of a man's soul from his deathbed to judgement. This great work established Elgar as a composer of the front rank, and makes great demands on singers, orchestral players and conductor.

The orchestra is the back-bone of any performance and Sinfonia of Arun certainly proved that this music is in their souls. The acoustics of the Hall were superb and the beauty of sound and balance between them, the choir and soloists was heard to great effect.

A highlight of the first part's performance was the atmosphere created by the Priest (later the Angel of the Agony), sung with great presence and command by Stuart Young, bass baritone, with choir and orchestra- 'Go, in the name of Angels and Archangels'.

Throughout the performance, the pacing and sensitivity of the conductor, John Henville was often very moving and effective, as was his complete understanding of the text.

The tenor (Gerontius, later the Soul) John English, gave us a most committed performance especially in the second part, where the vocal range is not so demanding. Susanna Spicer (mezzo soprano) sang the part of the Angel with great style, but her diction needed to be clearer. She possesses a most beautiful and rounded voice and was totally convincing.

Much praise for the overall effect must be heaped on the choir, whose clear diction and dynamic contrasts were most evident in this performance, especially in the second part, where the Angel of the Agony proved once again to be commanding, especially his grounded stance.

The soul saved his best work till last, when he performed the moving 'Take me away' to great effect.

One of Elgar's greatest melodies was beautifully sung by the Angel 'Softly and gently dearly ransomed soul' and was wonderfully accompanied by the choir, 'Praise to the Holiest' and orchestra and conductor, ending the masterpiece to generous and deserved applause.

The only disappointment in this inspiring evening's concert was the audience, of only about 250 in a hall with some 800 capacity. This was indeed a great shame, for these performers deserved to be better supported.

Anthony Roberts. 24.11.10