

Sunday Advertiser 09-Nov-01

# Handel did not need fireworks

STAGING Handel's *Messiah* in Guildford Cathedral in the first week in November was a big mistake.

Saturday night was like a front line. Fireworks exploded with loud bangs and gunfire stutter throughout the Guildford Philharmonic Choir's performance, spoiling its atmosphere of spirituality.

Jeremy Backhouse brought out the Baroque dance feel to the music, encouraging a light, fast, bouncy attack from the choir and from the excellent Brandenburg Sinfonia. The choir was noticeably more confident in the second half and the chorus *Since by Man came Death* admirably showed off their command of atmosphere, phrasing, dynamics and diction. *Worthy is the Lamb* was an impressive climax.

From mid nave, the soloists were a mixed success. Bass Colin Campbell did not project the required dark power and menace. Soprano Ghislaine Morgan is absolutely professional but her voice does not soar ethereally. Tenor Andrew Murgatroyd was fruity and warm but my favourite was the counter tenor Charles Humphries, who sang with enormous expressiveness and a beautiful tone, though it is doubtful how successfully it reached the back of the nave.

This elegant and quite polished performance deserved a better audience, and it definitely deserved to be heard free from Guy Fawkes Night interference.

Jane Garrett