

**The Musicmakers in the Llandaff
Festival**

Epic sound of Elgar's soul music

By IFAN
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REVIEW

ELGAR'S *The Musicmakers* is one of the great masterpieces of late romantic choral music and it is a continuing tragedy that we hear it performed in concert, and especially on record, less often than we should.

It is also a work with a fascinating sub-text, full of self references which seem to chart the course of both Elgar's musical and his romantic soul.

Every bit as spectacular as *Ein Heldenleben* or *Sinfonia Domestica*, two stirring late romantic musical self-portraits, *The Musicmakers* contains some of the most glorious focal writing of its period.

Indeed the work would seem to virtually sing itself, making an impact whatever the shortcomings of the execution.

On Monday evening in Llandaff Cathedral, Michael Smith led the Llandaff Cathedral Choral Society and the soloist Helen Willis in a performance that was direct and unfussy and in which

the nobility of this moving music spoke for itself.

Holst's *Hymn of Jesus* is full of high atmosphere and vigorous rhythms over which hangs a whiff of English-scented incense.

The work is effective even in as straightforward an account as that given here.

But the acoustics of the Cathedral make for pretty balances and murky articulation which can rob any performance of its true impact.

The festival orchestra, BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra, had the platform to itself for Delius's *A Walk to the Paradise Gardens*, and here the muted string-playing in particular was most beguiling.

The Llandaff Festival continues tonight with David Wilson-Johnson and David Owen Norris's stimulating and groundbreaking conception of Schubert's *Winterreise*. This will be performed in Howells School at 7.30pm.