# THE SEA SYMPHONY

Waltham Singers at Chelmsford Cathedral

16.11.13

Vaughan Williams' monumental Sea Symphony is almost a cantata. The choir, like the ocean itself, is an ever-present force of nature, enriching the orchestral palette.

The text – from Whitman's Leaves of Grass – is sublime, of course, but rarely heard in its entirety. And that was certainly the case for the Waltham Singers performance, when both the impressive choral forces and the two excellent soloists were often no match for the orchestra. The Salomon Orchestra was in fine form, with brass, strings and percussion effectively painting the seascape.

The choir did have their more traditional moments – the unaccompanied “Greater than the Stars or Sun”, or the breathtaking opening to The Explorers.

Andrew Fardell's firm direction ensured a memorably eloquent, vivid reading: the brooding On the Beach at Night Alone, the dramatic end to the hymn-like The Waves, and the meticulously judged, and deeply moving *envoi*, “further sail ...”

Our soloists were baritone Andrew Rupp, who impressed especially in the second Sea Drift sequence, and soprano Katherine Crompton, wrapped in a black fur coat in the chilly cathedral, rising thrillingly above the marine soundscape in “all brave captains”, for instance.

Two orchestral works began the programme: Brahms Variation on a Theme by Haydn, with a fine cantabile in the Grazioso, and a solemn, triumphant Andante finale. And, appropriately, Mendelssohn's Calm Sea and a Prosperous Voyage, the delicate string texture of still waters giving way to wind-powered forward movement, and a safe arrival heralded by a trumpet fanfare.