

Israel In Egypt, St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh

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Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, even in its shorter version, is a work not heard quite so often as it deserves. Nor, as a rule, is it performed quite well enough to confirm Tovey's belief that, at its best, it is greater than *Messiah*. But Saturday's performance, by the Edinburgh Singers, though it sometimes faltered where it should have swept onward, caught much of its splendour.

The plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the closing jubilations were projected with a keen sense of the music's imagery. Formed half a century ago, the Edinburgh Singers have updated themselves into a vivacious young choir, 60-voices strong, alert to Handel's vanguard oratorio in which duets and solos serve as brief, beautiful interludes between a vivid array of choruses. In the tricky acoustics of St Mary's, they projected well.

At 23. their conductor, Dominic Peckham, is a lithe and modern Handelian who is able to get the best from his vocal forces and from an orchestra whose handful of strings, bright-toned oboists, and trombones as well as trumpets and a pair of tiny period kettledrums contributed much to the success of the evening.

The six soloists, all promising products of the RSAMD, in Glasgow, made their contributions seem far from negligible. The passage evoking "thick darkness over the land" — in which, prophesying Schoenberg, the chorus delivers all 12 tones — was suitably dense. When, after two hours, the final fanfare sounded, the large audience cheered.