

# THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS, MUSIC HALL, ABERDEEN.

ALAN COOPER

★★★★★

WHEN Hans Richter conducted the first performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* in Birmingham on October 3, 1900, it was reportedly 'under rehearsed and somewhat chaotic'. The same could never be said of Sunday nights glorious performance given as a special tribute to Lady Aberdeen, who herself conducted the work no fewer than six times between 1954 and 1989. James Loughran conducted the Aberdeen Sinfonietta and a huge chorus drawn from the finest choirs from in and around the city of Aberdeen (including her own Haddo House Choral and Operatic Society). The playing of the hushed opening of the work was beautifully soft and transparent, more impressive even than the surging crescendos that followed, or the glorious upswellings of Elgar's melodies. Many times, the responsiveness of the instrumentalists took the breath away. The multi-layered vocal textures provided by chorus and semi-choruses throughout the work were well

mustered by Loughran. The 'Demons Chorus' was nicely clipped and clear, not overdone, while the eruption of the full chorus with 'Praise to the Holiest in the Height' swept all before it.

*Gerontius* was sung by the young Scottish tenor Iain Paton. His clear fresh singing grabbed the part through the expressiveness of his interpretation. Baritone Stephen Roberts sang in the last performance of the work conducted by Lady Aberdeen at Haddo House Hall in 1989. He sang the parts of the Priest and the Angel of the Agony with remarkable resonance and clarity.

Jean Rigby as the Angel did not have the same clarity of projection in her voice. However she grew into the part and her singing in 'Softly and Gently' was admirable.

At the end of the performance, the audience rose spontaneously in a standing ovation for Lady Aberdeen, whose long life in music has given so much to audiences over the years.