

Chorus rises to challenge

IT is a pleasant change to hear something other than *The Messiah*, and Handel's *Israel in Egypt* was certainly worth hearing.

More's the pity that the GPO's concert last Saturday, under the baton of Neville Creed, didn't draw a full house. Ironically when *Israel in Egypt* was first performed, it was a commercial flop, primarily because of the predominant role of the chorus. Although there are six soloists, most of the parts (apart from the alto) are small in comparison with Handel's other oratorios. Achieving variety with such extensive writing for chorus can be problematic, and I found the overall concept of dramatic progression missing in the earlier parts of the concert.

However, not only the textural variety, but also the continuity improved during the second half where the soloists featured more strongly.

Michael Chance, justifiably

one of the most highly regarded counter-tenors today, gave an ethereally beautiful rendition of the alto part, his vocal control being quite magical.

Both the soprano soloists, Ruth Holton and Nicola Jenkin, were likewise convincing, though I felt the tenor Philip Sheffield gave a less secure performance. The basses had only one item in which to sing, Graham Titus's voice being particularly majestic and dramatic.

At the end of the day, however, the banner of triumph should go to the Guildford Philharmonic Chorus, which rose heroically to the challenge of such a substantial role, producing some taut and well-disciplined choral singing. Bar a few unclear entries mainly at the beginnings of the arias, the orchestra also mustered some excellent playing, and obviously benefited from the dynamic conducting of Neville Creed.

Joann