

# Uncompromising devotion

Jerusalem Post

29-12-73 MUSIC REVIEWS

**SACRED MUSIC.** Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Gary Bertini conducting, the BBC Choir, directed by John Poole; the Chamber Choir of the Jerusalem Rubin Academy of Music, directed by Stanley Sperber; the "Sharonit," Children's Choir, directed by Ephraim Marcus; Gila Yaron, soprano; Mira Zakai, alto; Neil Jenkins, tenor; John Shirley-Quirk, bass-baritone (Jerusalem Theatre, December 25). **Mordechai Seter: Sabbath Cantata (1940); Josef Tal: "With all Thy Soul," Cantata for Hanukka (1978); W.A. Mozart: Vesperae Solennes de Confessore, K. 339.**

**SETER'S "SABBATH CANTATA"** occupies a special place in contemporary Israeli composition. It is the earliest long work bringing liturgical atmosphere to the concert hall. But, in contrast to the "Sacred Service" works written by Ernest Bloch (1930-33), by Milhaud (1947) and Marc Lavry (in the Fifties), this is not a concert work; it "suggests the atmosphere of mystery and spiritual uplift, with which Jewish tradition has always associated the coming of Sabbath Eve."

Based on Sephardi Bible cantillation, it applies counterpoint technique at great length, letting the four soloists share equally in their contributions. The choir, which is representative of the community, plays the main role.

All participants acquitted themselves honourably, though even the most driving direction by Gary Bertini could not make the rather excessive length of the work appear any shorter.

Josef Tal's most recent work also uses four soloists, a choir, a boys' choir and an orchestra consisting of three trumpets, four horns, three trombones, a tuba, eight celli and four double-basses.

Bass-baritone Shirley-Quirk sang the King who had to pronounce only two words in many variations (exhorting the sons to bow to the idol); the three women, representing the Mother in symbolic trinity — more a part of the chorus than separate soloists — were unnamed members of the BBC Choir.

The chorus made one brief statement ("They took him away and slew him!") and ended the work with a restrained "Hallelujah," no song of praise or jubilation, but rather a lament.

The children were given some lines from a Psalm which, in their simplicity, were more moving than the more elaborate cantillations of the soloists and the choir.

**THIS WORK** is not one of joy and celebration but of sadness over the sacrifice, a thoughtful reminder to us of the price Israel must pay for survival.

Gary Bertini devoted all his persuasive and inspiring strength to make this premiere a moving experience.

In Mozart's music, secular splendour dressed in a liturgical gown considerably brightened the not-so-festive mood of the concert. It was here that Gila Yaron at least had something more to sing than just ensemble lines (the alto and the tenor did not have anything soloistic to say all evening). She performed with beautifully-controlled phrasing and in fine voice.

Altogether, all forces — soloists, choirs, orchestra — combined to produce faultless and musically satisfying performances — due, no doubt, to Bertini's overwhelming drive and uncompromising devotion to each and every work he conducts.

YOHANAN BOEHM