

MUSIC

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A state of blessedness

It is no doubt that music has performed a great service to the Calcutta audience has not heard of the other, hummed or recalled, snatches from his popular operas. The "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves" from *Nabucco*, the "Cemeterial March" from *Aida*, the "Bridal" from *La Traviata*, and others. There are, on occasion, some operatic treasures in the form of DVDs and CDs that are available at local music stores, but these are quickly bought by eager aficionados who speak familiarly and appreciatively of the reigning tenors and divas and their favourite arias. But to hear these live in our city is a wonderful experience.

And so, in a state of beatitude, the audience flocked to St Paul's Cathedral on November 16 to attend the Verdi concert at the

invitation of the consul general of Italy. The concert was in celebration of the 200th birth anniversary of Verdi.

Conducted by the maestro, Marco Baldi, the evening featured Verdi's most famous arias and choruses. These were performed by soloists from the Neemrana Vocal Ensemble and from Italy, as well as from the Neemrana Music Foundation with an Indo-Italian orchestra. No programme brochures were distributed and so the individual singers, although announced, shall not be mentioned here.

The music foundation

consists of talented and dedicated singers trained by Sita Singh Buehler. Buehler herself is arguably the most prominent teacher in her field in India.

The chamber orchestra consisted of musicians from New Delhi, Calcutta, Darjeeling, Bangalore, and seven musicians (significantly, the latter played the woodwind and brass instruments) from Italy. The choir and the soloists consisted of 40 singers, and they sang choruses and arias from the great operas *Nabucco*, *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore*. They also performed the *Gloria* of *El Cid* from Verdi.



Verdi's music has such a stirring Wagneresque quality that it has been used all over the world in anthems and as incidental music. Therefore, it was not too surprising when my young companion, who was from Africa, jumped up in recognition and gasped, "My old school song!"

The orchestral performance was brilliant and well balanced. The soloists, sopranos, contraltos, tenors and baritone — all Indian, with the exception of one tenor who was Italian — were excellent in every aspect: presentation, projection and vocal timbre. Baldi conducted and accompanied the orchestra with purpose and delicacy, giving the whole performance a quality of professional finesse.

The concert closed with the exciting "Bridal" — the drinking song from *La Traviata*. This led to calls for an encore, and the piece was performed again, much to the delight of the listeners. The evening turned out to be a wonderful tribute to the memorable works of a great composer.