

Worth staying up for

Nigel Chapelle spends a mystical night in the Temple

THE Temple Church is a fine 13th-century building: soundly designed, and vested in the legal grandeur of the Bar. The lawyers of the Inner and Middle Temple raised almost half a million pounds to commission an epic, *The Veil of the Temple*, from Sir John Tavener, one of our most renowned but musically obscure composers.

Anthems take wing

THE PLANNING of the Salisbury Festival this summer showed great imagination. By way of a festival epilogue, Salisbury Cathedral hosted a closing Pentecost service featuring an extended new work by Simon McEnery, effectively one of Salisbury's "composers-in-residence".

This occasional new work, *Pentecost*, incorporates a sequence of processions, congregational hymn arrangements, anthems and instrumental interludes (piano, saxophone, bells and percussion). Some of the music lurches towards the anodyne; other bits would go down well at a Greenbelt-type event. Two choir anthems proved very effective indeed.

McEnery has already composed music for girls' voices, as well as a Millennium cantata, *The Way of the Cross*, for Salisbury Cathedral. Here, dispensing with his rather too predictable, Gospel-feel strumming accompaniments for the Festival Chorus, he revealed a marked gift for a far-from-anodyne type of a *cappella* vocal writing.

A vigil more than a concert, the event was to begin at 10 p.m. and conclude 7½ hours later at dawn. Thankfully, we were not expected to remain in our seats for the duration. I took my seat not knowing what to expect, awed by the sense of occasion.

The work begins with the passage of a blue-veiled woman from

the east to the west end of the church. The gorgeous soprano voice of Anglo-Indian Patricia Rozario floats across the church and a solitary candle burns; an eastern dukuk responds, and the first of eight cycles has begun. A Gospel reading, more incense, another candle: the Second Movement. And so it proceeds, each cycle the same basic set of events, but richer, deeper, bigger, and the progression of lighted candles like some device of medieval horology.

At times menacing, ominous, despairing, and yet full of calm, promise and peace, the work is ritualistic and unrelenting, held together in exquisite tension. With music and words from Islamic, Greek, Tibetan, Russian, Hebrew and Hindu traditions, it is an inspiring, massive, palpable hit.

By the time the massed choirs of the Temple Church and the Holst Singers reach the Eighth Movement, Tibetan horns, tam-tams, bells and organ have brought us to Mary recognising Christ, and herself as Hindu. This is an experience with the liturgical resonance of sacred oratorio; and a powerful sense that God is everywhere, within and without. The Temple's Stephen Layton has achieved something remarkable, not least in the imaginative presentation of Tavener's mystical score.

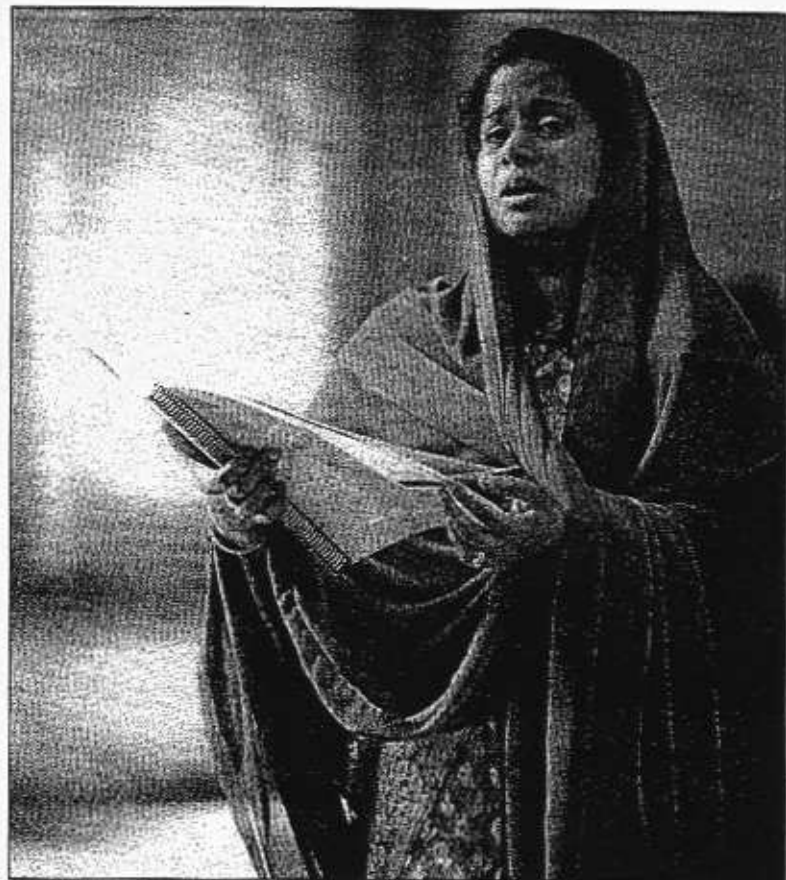
A request for no applause at the end saw the choir process out, receding from sight and sound, but not from the senses. As I emerged blinking into the London dawn, Sir John and Lady Tavener asked me how I had enjoyed it. I had, but words alone seemed incapable of communicating how I felt and the effect it had on me.

Another exception was a verse of "O thou, who camest from above" (to the tune by S. S. Wesley), beautifully accompanied by saxophone in the manner of Jan Garbarek, whose marvellous Jazz Quartet also featured in this year's festival.

McEnery's gift showed best in the subtle clusterings and clearly sung words of his Pentecostal anthem "A bit of a wisp of flame" (text: Dudley Reeves), and the exquisite soprano solo and answering choral writing of "The Holy Spirit is our Harpist".

This was an enchanted setting in translation, sensitively directed by Simon Lole, of the Saxon-born medieval mystic and Dominican (later Cistercian) nun Mechthild of Magdeburg (c.1210-85): "Effortlessly Love flows from God into man like a bird who rivers the air without moving her wings." This anthem arguably deserves a place in the repertoire alongside Stanford's "The Blue Bird".

Roderic Dunnett



Veiled: Patricia Rozario, singing from the score of *The Veil of the Temple*

Chelsea: think Assisi

JULIAN LLOYD WEBBER played a fine cello solo in the première of his late father William's oratorio *St Francis of Assisi* (1948) in Holy Trinity, Sloane Street, in the recent Chelsea Festival, writes Glyn Pafflin.

Before it began, Bishop Michael Marshall spoke about a possible link between the work and the book *The Message of St Francis of Assisi* (1925) by H. F. B. Mackay, the great pre-war Vicar of All Saints', Margaret Street, where William Lloyd Webber was organist in the 1940s.

However that might be, Dorothy

Pleydell-Bouverie's libretto, though dated, occasioned varied and attractive music that compares favourably with a work such as Dyson's *The Canterbury Pilgrims*. It helped to have the top-notch Joyful Company of Singers, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and six excellent soloists.

With Finzi's "God is gone up" and Haydn's *Cello Concerto in C*, it made for a long evening; the 8 p.m. concert ended at five past eleven. Sir Edward Heath stayed the course; Michael Portillo didn't.