

HOUSE FULL FOR VERNON HANDLEY CONCERT

FOR the first time since "Messiah" was performed two years ago, the "house-full" signs were up at the Civic Hall at a corporation concert on Sunday. The average attendance so far this season is 86 per cent, a figure which beats that of any other comparable musical organisation anywhere in Great Britain.

And the reason for this encouraging figure? There is no doubt that the biggest contributory factor is the personality of Vernon Handley, who not only brings the highest standard of musicianship and conducting to all that he does, but who also has the knack of giving self-confidence to those who work with him, thus bringing out the best in them.

Having said this, let me add that there were several defects, albeit slight ones, in the concert. Nothing is so hard to play well as a straight classical programme, and popular works by Brahms, Mozart and Beethoven invite comparison with established orchestras.

But these defects were mostly such as could have been put right with a little more rehearsal-time: details of phrasing, an odd note out of tune, ensemble, etc. The time may soon be approaching when the corporation will have to ask itself whether the present number of rehearsals are sufficient to maintain the increasingly high standard of performance demonstrated, for instance, on the record of Bax's 4th Symphony, just released.

WELL SHAPED

The Variations on the St. Anthony Chorale were given a well-shaped performance, though it took a few variations for the orchestra to settle down. Incidentally, is Haydn no longer credited with having composed the fertile theme with its unusual five-bar phrases? No mention of his name was on the programme.

The most successful piece in the concert was the clarinet concerto of Mozart. This was a beautifully poised performance on the part of the orchestra's principal clarinettist, John Denman.

I have never heard the adagio played so quietly and so slowly, yet with such control and grace. John Denman, aged 31, is a potential world-beater.

It was many years since I had

heard the Eroica Symphony, and for me there were a number of Beethoven felicities that I had quite forgotten. How refreshing it is to hear a great work like this after a long interval! I had also forgotten the huge scale of the work, especially the first two movements. Yet it made such an impression on Frederick the Great's nephew, Prince Louis Ferdinand, when he first heard it, that he had the whole work played twice more as an encore; there was no musicians' union in those days to argue about over-time.

Beethoven is not Vernon Handley's strongest composer, but he gave a quite acceptable account of the music. The funeral march, in particular, with its imaginative acciaccaturas in the bass-line, emulating drum-rolls, was most effectively played.—C. C.