

Ovation for Vernon Handley after concert of 20th century music

THE performance of orchestral music has reached a cul-de-sac in London's two main concert halls and it is necessary to come to Guildford in order to hear a programme which does not contain at least one repertoire favourite.

This "play safe" attitude is not one which has been adopted by the conductor of the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra, Vernon Handley, and he reaped the benefit of his policy at the end of Saturday's concert in Guildford Civic Hall, the seventh in the "enterprising" series.

The audience called him back six times and the players of the Guildford Philharmonic gave him the supreme and rarely given accolade of hardened professional musicians by refusing to stand with him and acknowledge the applause of the audience.

The applause was for a very balanced programme and for a perfectly timed climax to the last piece, Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphoses on Themes of Weber*. *Metamorphoses* is an apt word to describe Hindemith's treatment of some of Weber's lesser-known themes, as the result goes much further than mere variations.

The piece is full of fun but needs skillful playing as the second movement exploits the characteristics of each section of the orchestra. The players rose to the challenge of this very well and then combined to produce a noisy but very impressive finale.

The Proteus Choir and soprano Elaine Blighton joined the orchestra for Paulenc's *Gloria*. This was first performed in January, 1961, and the sincerity and beauty of the composition are the most striking points about it. The Proteus sang with a great feeling for the religious atmosphere of the music and this, together with the very clear and clean tone of the soloist, were the keys to the success of the work.

The men's voices were a little under strength, but there are very few choirs in the country which have as many male voices as they would like.

The choir's words were very clearly pronounced and could be heard better than those of Miss Blighton, who at times sacrificed enunciation for her admittedly beautiful tone.

The pieces which the orchestra recorded on Sunday were the other two pieces in the programme. Moeran's *Serenade in G*, and Bax's "The Tale the Pine Trees Knew," are two very contrasting 20th-century works, the former being full of Irish melodism and the latter much more strong and definite in manner.

There is an important part for percussion instruments in the serenade and especially for the side drum, and after a brief

moment when the sticks were conspicuously just behind the beat, the panache which is characteristic of the serenade was effectively conveyed by the orchestra.

The Bax was directed with the authority of a man who has taken a very close interest in the music of this neglected composer.

Saturday's concert will rank as one of the highlights of the season and, with between seven and eight hundred people attending the enterprising series of concerts, it might be worth the corporation spending more money on this type of music—for this 20th-century music is evidently what people want to hear.—R. B.

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