

# Entertainment and the Arts

## Vernon Handley's Prom debut with Sir Adrian

VERNON Handley made his debut at a Promenade Concert last week when he conducted the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra in two of the main works of a British/Beethoven programme. The two other items were under his original mentor, Sir Adrian Boult.

Orchestrally the more important of the two works handled by Handley was the *Meditations on a Theme of John Blow* by Bliss. This was played in memory of the composer who died earlier in the year. The last time Handley played this was with the G.P.O. at Canterbury and the immediate comparison between the two occasions was in the acoustics. For all the vicissitudes of the Cathedral, the effect came across with more immediacy there than in the

rather remote vastnesses of the Royal Albert Hall which somehow seems to disperse, dissipate, sound so mercilessly.

Nevertheless the B.B.C.S.O. managed to reproduce the requisite variety in these variations, from flailing attack to meditative single flute and oboe. Half a dozen timpani/percussion in the 100-strong ensemble ensured the maximum impact possible in such a hall, while Handley also succeeded in the inexorability of his reading to navigate the eddying vortices and cross-currents skilfully.

### Magic missing

From this welter of material, we heard the bites of brass, skittering massed woodwind,

harp with high strings, and some fairly vivid verticality of entry. The work is certainly a fusion of old and new into a satisfying unity, yet in the acoustic context of this Prom performance, we missed the enveloping Canterbury magic, with its veritable trident of sound from the three-prong points of leading violins, brass and timpani/percussion.

I have always thought of the B.B.C.S.O. as possessing substantial depth in its string tone, from the days of hearing it at the Royal Naval Barracks, Portsmouth, some 30 years ago!

This is still a feature, not surprisingly since it boasts 55 string players. Their quality came to the fore during the

main work of the evening, the Beethoven Violin Concerto in D major. The soloist was Ilzhak Perlman who contracted polio at the age of four. There was nothing disabled about this virtuoso, however, and with Handley he managed to produce a memorable rendering of the much-played masterpiece. During the silken string idyll he yielded some transcendental moments.

Spacious woodwind and strong string forces gave continuity to the soloist. Tod Handley chiselled away at his concerto dovetailing with craftsmanship — the sort of musical carpentry so familiar to Guildford audiences! The end of the Kreisler cadenza

marked such intimacy between soloist and conductor.

Accompaniment was kept alert yet light, with woodwind and brass ranged in two rows at the rear, a stroke that successfully separated their layers of sound. The larghetto came across as possibly the best of the three movements. There was a magic mood in moments such as the clarinet/violin solo dialogue, while Perlman played with a quality suggested by his name—pearl-like. Similarly in the rondo, the horn responses to the solo were fine. Perlman and Handley shared an ovation as prolonged as any heard for some time at a Prom.

Boult had set the tone for the evening with Elgar's elegiac Introduction and Allegro for Strings, with violas making one of their rare prominent contributions. Berkeley's *Voices of the Night* turned out to be a pleasant nocturne in meandering mood for large forces including vibraphone, harp and muted brass.—J.F.T.