

GPO end year with Mozart and new work

SPARKLING Mozart with a dash of newly distilled bitters made a refreshing draught for the audience to quaff at Venon Handley's last concert of the year with the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir at the Civic Hall.

Three present principals of the orchestra, James Brown (oboe), Nicholas Hunka (bassoon) and Peter Clack (horn), and one recently past, John Denman (clarinet), played Mozart's delightful Sinfonia Concertante in E Flat with beautiful balance and intimacy.

Control of smooth dynamics is not so easy in a wind ensemble as with strings, but all the subtleties of phrasing in quartet were executed with seemingly instinctive ease. In the combined power of tone, the clarinet sometimes dominated and there might have been more delicacy if Mozart

had stuck to his original intention of the flute, but the pure cantabile of the Adagio arioso and the mock pomposity of the final Andantino, with its intricate Variations, were most pleasurable. The orchestra, led by Hugh Bean, accompanied with unhurried grace.

How good it was to hear a modern work of some pretension uncluttered by serial freakishness. Carey Blyton is not a composer whose name has come my way before, but his *Lachrymae, In Memoriam John Dowland*, is something I shall look forward to hearing again.

It is, in effect, a song cycle, "for high voice and string orchestra" to poems by Drummond, Shelley, Weiss, Blake and Daniel. Though sad in conception it never sinks to the gloom of a dirge, but affords a broad spectrum of rich harmonic texture, retaining Tudor

techniques, enhanced rather than disturbed by modulated dissonances.

Sally Burgess, out of the Royal College of Music only this year, gave a finely graded performance of the neo-modal solo part. Her warm soprano voice, evenly toned throughout its range, was movingly sorrowful, especially in the concluding *Sonnet* by Samuel Daniel, *Care-Charmer Sleep*.

The Philharmonic choir, roused from their patient seats, exhibited an excellent blend of choral tone and united volume in Mozart's splendid *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*. One expects Vespers to be quietly gentle, but Mozart gave these a vigour and joyful zest more typical of a Jubilate.

The glorification did drop to a reverent pianissimo in the *Beatus Vir*, however, and, though the choir lost some

impetus at the start of the *Magnificat*, and the basses revealed some lack of depth in the *Laudate Pueri*, it was, in all, a most spirited and sometimes thrilling performance of a taxing work.

In her well-sustained and steadily unaffected soprano Yvonne Kenny, from Australia, used her growing experience of concert singing to fine effect in the *Laudate Dominum*, though her consonants could have been crisper. The other soloists, who made up a worthy quartet in the interpolations, were Sally Present, Dennis O'Neil and John Rath.

The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba at the court of Solomon was marked by Handel's bustling strings and shimmering oboe fanfares, as an appropriate opening to the programme.

John C. Dodds.