

Performers brought home loveliness of Brahms's music

BRAHMS'S *Requiem* is a fulsome, lyrical work which is best enjoyed in a fully relaxed position. Indeed, I last heard it lying flat out in the arena of the Royal Albert Hall one hot evening during the '84 Proms season.

Space is what this composition needs, so Guildford Cathedral was a fine choice for last Saturday's performance of Brahms's *Requiem*, when the combined forces of Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonic Choir and Goldsmiths Choral Union brought home to a large audience the loveliness of this music.

Brian Wright conducted, giving a great deal of attention to some fine detail of dynamics in the opening chorus, to the lyrical flow of choruses, such as *How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings* and to the sheer power of the penultimate chorus with its defiant *Death Where Is Thy Sting?* message. The large choral forces responded magnificently to his baton, producing the best sound I have ever heard in the cathedral (but why weren't the Goldsmiths rent-a-chorus at Guildford for the larger Berlioz work?). The sopranos sang beautifully, the alto line floated across the nave in a most beguiling way and, by heck, even the tenors were impressive as they soared in with the final "*selig sind die toten.*"

It was a disciplined performance, firmly rhythmical and one in which the enjoyment of the singers was as evident in the moments of sensitive, delicate singing as in the more monumental passages. Credit, therefore, not only to the singers and their conductor for a musical achievement of a high order, complete with crisp German enunciation, but also to the preparatory work done by the Guildford Philharmonic Choir's chorus master Simon Halsey.

Two distinguished soloists added further pleasure to the evening, David Wilson-Johnson bringing a rich vein to his solo while Sheila Armstrong was magically delicious in the expressively tranquil *Ihr Habt Nun Traurigkeit.*

The Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra accompanied — and that is the correct word, for this is predominantly choral work — impeccably, supporting the harmonic choral line with just the right level of sound.

The requiem was preceded by that fine string composition, *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* by Vaughan Williams (which must be one of music's more confusing titles), in which the principal feature was the commendable breadth of phrasing achieved by the orchestra, thus building on those long, sustained chords which set the mood for the entire piece.

Robert Benjafield.