

Review

Cathedral full for Mozart 'Requiem'

THE cathedral was almost packed to the doors (and so was the car park, alas) to hear Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir perform Mozart's last and perhaps most famous church work, the *Requiem* in D minor, K626, last Saturday evening.

It was a rare and very encouraging sight on a bitterly cold night.

The composition of the *Requiem* has always been shrouded in a certain degree of mystery. Was Mozart actually affected by his mysterious (and ghostly) guest who commissioned the *Requiem*? Did he really believe it was to be a requiem for his own early death? And when he died prematurely, how much of it was completed by his faithful pupil, Sussmayer?

Whatever the solutions to these romantically gloomy questions (and most of them have been more or less answered) there was no mystery and precious little gloom

in Saturday's performance.

Under the baton of the German conductor, Wilfried Boettcher, both playing and singing was polished, with no extremes of spiritual emotion (no fireworks, in fact, despite the date!), emphasising, if anything, the spirits of hope and salvation rather than the gloom of impending doom. A luminous performance in a numinous setting.

Thus the graceful prayers of the *Lacrimosa* and the profound piety of the *Agnus Dei* were, perhaps, the most impressive moments of the evening, elevating in more senses than one, for in the ethereal acoustics of the cathedral much of the sweet tone of the sopranos ascended to the heavens bounded by the chancel roof before echoing to the nave.

This strangely unworldly effect was also noticeable in the splendid *Offertorium*, in which the sturdy tenors proved they were far from becoming a dying choral race and finished with a fine fugue — almost surpassing in brilliance the earlier double fugue of the *Kyrie Eleison*.

The combined forces attacked *Rex Tremendae*, Mozart's fiercest moment, with sudden shock, more so than was found necessary for the sombre *Dies Irae*, but Alastair Miles announced the *Tuba Mirum* with a ponderous bass which well matched the trombone lead.

Mr. Miles was one, and the

strongest, of the four young soloists, whose conjoint efforts were well suited to the testing *Recordare* quartet, though not always in timbre.

Melanie Armitstead's fluting, youthfully fresh soprano was delightful in *Lux perpetua*. John Mark Ainsley's clear, natural tenor and Yvonne Howard's varied alto tone colour added laudable backing, though the carriage of solo voices to the further ends of the long nave was only intermittent.

Herr Boettcher's direction was calm and precise, Germanic in manner but never relaxing the steady tempo, and the orchestra was well up to GPO form, led by John Ludlow (with Hugh Bean in close attendance).

The strings, which the cathedral absorbs with so much more sympathy than voices, rose and fell delectably in Mozart's early symphony, No. 25 in G minor (K.183), which filled the first half of the programme. And here maestro Boettcher proved conclusively his justified reputation as a master of Mozartian orchestral music.

Finally, it was pleasant to see Neville Creed sharing the plaudits on his first major success as chorus master for the Philharmonic Choir. His thorough training no doubt enabled the choir to deal with the latest edition of the *Requiem*, by Franz Beyer in 1979, successfully in the changed detail it involves. *John C. Dodds*

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Nov 1988