

Review

Music for the birds

BIRDS figure large in next Sunday's concert by Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra.

The concert honours and raises money for the centenary of the Royal

Society for the Protection of Birds.

Its programme includes Respighi's *The Birds*, Delius's *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* and Vaughan Williams's *The Lark*

Ascending.

Conductor is Vernon Handley, a bird lover and wildlife photographer, whose bird pictures will also be on show at the Civic Hall.

The concert is on November 26.



Vernon Handley, former Guildford Borough director of music, who conducted the Civic concert in place of the indisposed Sir Charles Groves.

A triumphant return

THE choice of Vernon Handley as stand-in conductor for Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra on Saturday was an act of inspiration.

Not only does he have a special relationship with the orchestra, in his role as former borough director of music, but he is the acknowledged expert on the music of Edward Elgar.

Orchestra, choir and conductor welded a unity of vision that was quite outstanding. The performance of the famous *Enigma Variations* could have made a definitive recording.

This was Guildford's professional orchestra at its very best, totally committed and caught up in Handley's electrifying intensity.

The concert began with Elgar's setting of the Laurence Binyon poem *For the Fallen*, which mourns the glorious dead without wallowing in patriotic glory of war.

It contains the legendary

lines: "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old..." and evokes poignant images of jaunty recruits laughing and joking and dying.

Elgar responded with a sensitive musical setting for choir and soloist, the poignancy coming over in melodic line above jolly marching rhythm; nobility and religious feeling emerging from the grief.

The choir was in fine voice, responding to Handley's phrasing with delicate control. The soloist for the Elgar, and later for Finzi's *Intimations of Immortality*, was Ian Partridge, and this renowned lyric tenor was sadly a huge disappointment.

His thoughtful phrasing was lost on the majority of the packed audience in Guildford Civic Hall, for there was absolutely no projection powering his voice to the back row. Strained and thin, it rarely rose above orchestra and choir. If they had been silenced to match his weakness, the wonderful shape of the music would

have been lost.

Handley's interpretation and his superb relationship with choir and orchestra made the whole concert technically immaculate and exciting. The *Enigma Variations* were a joy, each one beautifully crafted with spot-on dynamics, rhythm changes and sudden windows of light. There was no holding back on the whizz-bang-crash personalities portrayed, and there was equally the greatest delicacy in the wind and string solos.

The second half of the concert was given over to Finzi's setting of William Wordsworth's metaphysical poem from *Recollections of Early Childhood*.

This marvellous modern work follows Wordsworth's mood changes closely through the poem, with ear-splitting climaxes, and the still, small voice of the philosopher.

Partridge's voice was very still and small, the only disquieting element in a fabulous concert.

Jane Garrett

Youngsters to play in Proms

SURREY youngsters will be performing in the final concert of this year's School Proms at the Royal Albert Hall.

The talented young musicians are all members of the Surrey County Youth Orchestra, which is taking part in the prestigious concert series for the fifth time.

The youth orchestra has 100 members drawn from all over the county, and the average age is just 15 years.

The prom programme will include Malcolm Arnold's overture *Tam O'Shanter*, conducted by John Forster and Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1* conducted by Antony Hopkins.

The three prom concerts run from November 27-29.