

Audience responds to cello warmth and choral power

INTERNATIONAL cellist Felix Schmidt's performance of Elgar's famous concerto on Saturday proved that the work does not need Jacqueline du Pre-style emotionalism to bring out the passion and the pathos.

The Civic Hall audience was not only treated to Schmidt's very musical interpretation, but also to the expertise of former Guildford director of music conductor Vernon Handley, one of the greatest exponents of Elgar's music.

Schmidt's clean but warm tone never went OTT. His intonation was spot on, and his bowing arm was wonderfully relaxed for the frenetic passages in the Allegro Molto.

He brought out the introversion of the Adagio very well, and the slow section of the finale emphasised his super bow control, which enabled him to create a sense of withdrawn isolation — Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra holding back to provide a sensitive accompaniment.

The orchestra, apart from some poor brass intonation, was alert and responsive under Handley's baton and the audience responded to the concerto with enormous enthusiasm.

The concert of music by British composers started with Britten's arrangement of the National Anthem, accompanied by an erratic crescendo of seats snapping shut as the audience uncertainly and belatedly rose to its feet.

It proved a good warm-up piece for the vastly improved Philharmonic Choir, which

went on to perform magnificently in Vaughan Williams' electric *Sea Symphony*.

From the clean brass fanfare which starts the work the performance was confident and exciting. The choir produced a good soprano tone and Handley made the most of choir and orchestra's dynamic palette to bring out the expansive descriptiveness of Vaughan Williams' writing.

Baritone Brian Rayner Cook's vigorous and articulate delivery made the poetry by Walt Whitman come alive and soprano Alison Pearce easily projected her fine voice over the choir and orchestra.

The choir put enormous energy and power into their singing.

The result was a terrific performance to round off the '91/92 season of concerts.

Jane Garrett