

Magnificent memorial to conductor

NATIONAL politicians, the borough council and Surrey music lovers converged on Guildford Cathedral on Friday night to pay homage to the musicianship of Sir Charles Groves, principal conductor of the philharmonic orchestra, who died in June.

It was a magnificent

and poignant concert which the distinguished conductor would have appreciated.

John Lill, the international pianist, played Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*. Then Guildford Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra performed the Mozart Requiem. Both soloist and choice of music held significance in this memorial concert: Lill had a tremendous rapport with Sir Charles and he played the *Emperor Concerto* in the last concert he conducted in

Guildford before his stroke.

Friday's memorial began with the immaculate treble voices of the cathedral choir singing the *Pie Jesu* from Faure's *Requiem* from the balcony high above the transept.

The conductor was En Shao, the gifted Chinese musician who conducted the previous week's concert by the philharmonic at the Civic Hall, and the orchestra clearly responds well to his direction.

The accompaniment to the Beethoven was most sensitively done, with clean phrasing, daylight and mystery.

Lill played with his customary authority despite having had to use the cathedral piano for the rehearsal as the Steinways grand was delayed on the M25.

The concerto had a completely different feel to it, played in the echoing space of the cathedral. Lill achieved some fantastic dynamic extremes, while the tumbling runs

were transformed into a thunderous blur of sound which was extremely exciting.

Fiona Firth-Spiller, soprano, Pauline Cayzer, mezzo-soprano, Andrew King, tenor and substitute bass, Robert Carpenter-Taylor, made a very well matched quartet for the Mozart.

Acoustic idiosyncracies meant that the *Dies Irae* lacked menace at the back of the nave, but otherwise the dynamics were well disciplined and the choir sang with confi-

dence and accuracy.

The basses leaped into *Rex Tremendae* with gusto and a swelling crescendo, and the *Lacrimosa* also reflected En Shao's attention to phrasing.

The cathedral was packed for the memorial, and all the musicians gave their services free. Proceeds will be used to establish a Sir Charles Groves Endowment Fund to support a young professional musician.

Jane Garrett