

Strident sounds but soloists disappoint

GUILDFORD Civic Hall reverberated to the clashing of cymbals, the strident braying of brass and shouted pagan earthiness on Saturday.

It was of course Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, the ultimate choral/orchestral work for letting one's hair down.

The Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra thoroughly enjoyed the no-holds-barred atmosphere under the baton of experienced conductor Sir David Willcocks, and the philharmonic choir, swelled by Guildford Royal Grammar School choir, made a splendid effort to overcome its Surrey politesse.

Diction was clear, the tone slightly menacing and the chorus managed a good rough shout when necessary, as in *Swaz Hie Gat Umbe* and the end of *Were Diu Werlt Alle Min*.

Veris Leta Facies was a bit feeble but the choir gradually got caught up in the atmosphere and sounded terrific. The men were very good in *In Taberna Quando Sumus*.

For the audience in the gallery, the disappointment was the soloists, whose voices simply failed to project beyond the orchestra.

Baritone Michael Pearce and tenor Peter Hall had exactly the right tone and expression -- lascivious, cunning, drunken etc, but it was frustratingly hard to hear. If they had sung out to the back of the hall the whole performance would have been lifted.

Pearce coped with the acoustic better than Hall, and he also had by far the biggest role. *Estuans Interius* was well done but just did not project.

Hall produced a chilling Eastern wail which should have been, absolutely spine tingling... only it was comprehensively drowned by the orchestra.

Soprano Tinuke Olafihan failed to let herself go and sounded inappropriately careful.

But the overall performance was boisterous and exciting, taken at cracking pace and with good deafening crescendos and climaxes.

The concert on Saturday began with a fairly uninspired performance of Beethoven's Overture *Coriolan Op 62*. The piano strings could have been a lot more intense and the windows of silence were not always cleanly defined.

But the popular Elgar *Enigma Variations* were performed with polish and panache. John Meek played a lovely viola solo for the *Ysobel* variation. *Dora Penny* was delicately done making a splendid contrast with the explosive *Dr George Sinclair* variation. String tone was excellent but towards the end anticipation of *Carmina Burana* got the better of the brass which was just too loud.

Jane Garrett