

Composer conducts his own cantata

THE Guildford Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra had a rare treat on Saturday, when Jonathan Willcocks came to the Civic Hall to conduct his own cantata, *Great is the Glory*.

It is pleasing to listen to, technically very sound, and the words, selected from the Psalms, are set most effectively, with striking choral and orchestral sonorities, not to mention the exquisite blending of the solo tenor.

One could detect, particularly in the modal harmonies and echoes of Howells, Walton, and Vaughan Williams, the influence of the cathedral tradition on which the composer was brought up.

If there was a criticism, it would be that it was too long for what it had to say, with over-much repetition of words and motifs.

For all that, it was the kind of piece that guaranteed wild applause, fully deserved for the inspiring and lively performance which it received, including the lovely strains of tenor, James Oxley.

Notwithstanding the sudden break necessitated by a broken string, Alexander Baillie's playing of Elgar's cello concerto, that piece of searing emotions and violent contrasts, reached the heights of inspiration as well as brilliance. The orchestra coped well with a tricky score full of subtleties, especially in that gossamer light second movement.

A stirring performance of Parry's setting of Milton's splendid words, *Blest Pair of Sirens*, with a nice degree of climactic tension, had opened the evening.

Shelagh Godwin.