

Half-baked ideas about the GPO

Early 1998?

Sir, Having read your report (December 6) on the projected "dramatic shake-up for town orchestra" may I, as a former

reviewer of Guildford Philharmonic concerts in your newspaper for nearly 20 years, ask a few questions?

Who is describing the GPO's music as "the constraints of a formal standardised concert series"?

Who is claiming that "audiences are getting less and less musically adventurous"?

Who is calling this an "exclusive and elitist market"?

And who is Nicola Gould to come storming into Guildford with her half-baked ideas "challenging the whole meaning of Philharmonic".

Doesn't she realise that the Guildford Philharmonic, under several illustrious conductors, has built up a reputation as one of the leading provincial symphony orchestras in Britain?

Does En Shao agree with her ideas? Does Vernon Handley agree?

I travelled a total of 200 miles to the last, brilliant concert of Beethoven/Brahms on December 14. Are we going to have fewer classical concerts? Audiences have always been excited about classical music. What on earth is meant by "in the broadest sense"?

Surely, Guildford Borough Council will not abandon its support of the GPO in its present style? I do not want pop classics.

JOHN FRAYN TURNER
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The Metropole,
Folkestone.

Letters

Fax

Must orchestras follow public taste rather than lead it?

Sir, I have looked at the programmes for the forthcoming season by the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra. Their content raises a lot of large questions.

Can an orchestra survive seriously by performing only one symphony per year? And that one, the Dvorak *New World*?

Last season the GPO gave a breathtakingly brilliant account of the Beethoven Seventh Symphony — and virtually no more. Similarly with concerts. After the Chopin *Piano Concerto No. 1*, also in the opening concert with the *New World*, virtually nothing.

Admittedly there is a span of great choral music.

Several other things

emerge on close analysis of the GPO prospects. Only six concerts are actually by the full orchestra. The rest are chamber-based.

And, of course, of these six, several are composed of shorter pieces of popular appeal.

This is obviously to try to make the orchestra more economically justifiable. But how far should such a policy go?

Must orchestras now follow public taste rather than try to lead it?

Music lovers like me may be lost forever to an orchestra they have admired for 35 years. No-one may mind.

It may be a sign of the times. Perhaps symphony orchestras will become extinct — but I hope no-one ever calls them elitist.

I am sick of being branded by this word simply in seeking to preserve and nurture the best in the arts.

Meanwhile, I shall go to that opening concert, but not many of the remaining dozen or so.

JOHN TURNER

16 Church Street,
Leatherhead.

Listen to us for fine choral works

Sir, Following the letters criticising the demise of the Guildford Philharmonic, as we have all known it, might I, as chairman of the Guildford Philharmonic Choir, invite the writers and others to our concerts next season.

For symphony lovers, we shall be performing Mahler Symphony No. 2 and Bruckner Mass in E minor on March 13, 1999, in the cathedral.

The choir has for the past 50 years performed with the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra the great choral works of both well-known and lesser-known composers for the music lovers of Guildford, supported by an enlightened and forward-looking borough council.

Under the new scheme,

the choir has been separated from the orchestra and the borough organisation and is promoting its own concerts.

Details of these were not allowed in the new season's borough brochure but do look out for our forthcoming publicity!

We are very much looking forward to an exciting season performing works of quality and integrity.

Our plans mean that we shall be singing even more than usual and playing our full part in the musical life of Guildford.

JOHN TRIGG

(Chairman, Guildford Philharmonic Choir)

13 Vicarage Gate,
Onslow Village,
Guildford.

GPO 'pop' music is not what I want

Sir, I have just received the future programme of the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra and I regret that, for the second successive season, the concerts are unlikely to receive my patronage.

It is sad to see this orchestra, which built its outstanding reputation primarily on its performances of early 20th century British music, not being given a single piece of Elgar, Delius, Walton or (the lightweight *Fantasia on Christmas carols* apart) Vaughan Williams to play — not to mention Parry, Bax or Bliss!

And can a programme ever have been devised before for a symphony orchestra that contains only one symphony in a whole year — and that the already over-exposed *New World* — and only one concerto?

The more discerning music lovers of the Guildford area will clearly have to travel to Dorking, Basingstoke, Woking or London to satisfy their requirements to hear good orchestral music this coming season.

Perhaps, in the meantime, Guildford Borough Council should consider renaming the GPO the Guildford Pops Orchestra, for this is surely what it has now become.

Or perhaps the council should review its support for this ensemble and its general manager altogether and consider giving it instead to arts organisations in the borough for whom quality and artistic integrity are still important considerations.

PETER ANDREWS

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☐ See also theatre and arts, on page 17.