

There are other orchestras

Sir, Some of your correspondents are unhappy about the new and more varied style of programming shown in the GPO's brochure for 1998-99; not enough symphonies and concertos, they say. As far as we are concerned, if the GPO's new approach brings more people into contact with good live music, we're all for it.

There are still plenty of opportunities for the music-lovers of the Guildford area to enjoy their symphonies and concertos, however. This autumn, for example, the Surrey Mozart Players are performing Brahms's *Second Symphony* and Beethoven's *Fourth Piano Concerto* at the Farnham Maltings on September 26, and the Guildford Symphony Orchestra will be offering Sibelius's *First Symphony* at the Civic Hall on November 15, with Andrew Haveron playing the Brahms *Violin Concerto*. Local musicians providing great music for the local community.

Yes, they are amateurs, but ask any of our regular audiences about the standard achieved.

We believe that the Guildford area remains well served with the full range of live music performances, and that the Guildford Symphony Orchestra and the Surrey Mozart Players deserve the support of your readers – as does the GPO, of course.

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GPO manager has worked wonders

Sir, I was disappointed to read the comments in your letters column last week (August 21) about the forthcoming season of the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra. The article by Jane Garrett on the same subject which featured our brilliant new orchestra manager, Nicola Goold, did much to redress the balance.

Your correspondents seem to have missed the point completely. At the time of going to press on the brochure (a year before some of the concerts), some of the detail of individual concerts was not available. Therefore to assume that there will be "only one symphony per year" is clearly a rash assumption.

In fact, this is not the case. I am not sure how many symphonies, concertos and overtures your correspondents require per season, but my requirement, and that of the thousands of people who enjoyed the concerts last year, is that we enjoy a season of varied music from different styles, periods, countries and composers, all played to the highest possible standard. This was achieved in last year's season.

Peter Andrews then complains that the symphony mentioned is the "already over-exposed *New World*". Surely a great work is always great however often it is played. As an English specialist I do not avoid seeing productions of *Hamlet* on the grounds that I have been known to see the odd production before.

Guildford Borough Council is quite

justifiably proud of its orchestra. Indeed we are almost the only local authority to maintain an orchestra with very little outside grant aid. We have to move and adapt, however, in common with almost everything else in life. To stand still is to decline and to die.

Our audiences were getting smaller and the age profile was becoming higher a few years ago. This is happening to concert audiences all over the country. Two years ago we engaged Nicola Goold to redress this decline. This she has done superbly, together with her very hard-working and knowledgeable staff in the music office. She has given us more music for less money. We have greatly reduced the subsidy per capita, and many of last year's concerts were sold out. Indeed an average audience capacity of 92% has been achieved. Guildford is now in the vanguard of the new thinking on classical concerts and a model for other parts of the country.

I am looking forward to the new season with keen anticipation. Within my own borough, in a variety of attractive venues, I can experience concerts of medieval music, Baroque, romantic, operatic, contemporary and much more. How fortunate to be a classical music lover living in Guildford.

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What would Handley think?

Sir, May I reply to Jane Garrett's summary of the Guildford Philharmonic's programmes for the new season, under its manager Nicola Goold?

I agree that the problems facing orchestras are "universal". I do not agree that an audience of 3,600 signifies that it was automatically "the orchestra's most successful concert". If you judge success by quantity alone, the Spice Girls are much more successful.

When I reviewed concerts for many years, Vernon Handley wrote that I was the first media person to understand and reflect what he and the GPO were trying to do in Guildford. Nicola Goold and Jane Garrett may not even have been born then. How dare they say dismissively: "But now it is time to do something different."

I detect that Jane Garrett's comments are peppered with derogatory insinuations. I "mourn the

passing of this traditional diet". I am "somewhat snide" because I refer to the Dvorak's *New World Symphony* as the symphony of the whole season. It is a great work admittedly, but it is the only symphony listed.

Then there is the inevitable reference to the "expensive and elitist drain" on public funds. The way appears to be to attract "new punters". Concerts are not betting shops. Nor can candlelight or laser lights be substitutes for great music – or aids to their appreciation.

By today's standards, Nicola Goold and Jane Garrett may both be right. All I can say is that I have been listening to music in Guildford and elsewhere for six decades. In future, it will have to be increasingly elsewhere. I wonder what Vernon Handley thinks?

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