

2/10/98

LETTERS Fax

Variety is the spice of life for Philharmonic

Sir, I have followed the correspondence concerning the Guildford Philharmonic with considerable interest.

Two themes emerge: firstly that the programme contains too many popular and too few challenging works, and secondly, that the Philharmonic Choir is only performing one concert with the Philharmonic Orchestra in the 1998-1999 season.

As far as the programming is concerned, our intention is to offer to the Guildford public as wide ranging a choice of classical music as possible within the scope of 14 concerts, which in 1998/1999 range from medieval music to a contemporary percussion ensemble.

While appreciating the needs of "the more experienced concert-goer," the future of musical life in Guildford depends on kindling an interest in classical music in all its forms, often in people who have never been to a classical concert before.

The Guildford

Philharmonic's general manager was brought in (having worked on the BBC Proms for nine years) to increase audiences and broaden repertoire against a background of budgetary constraints, and these objectives have certainly been met during the past season.

The previous format of 12 large scale orchestral concerts in two venues was not being supported by sufficient numbers of people to justify its continuance.

However, audiences last season averaged 92%, and the total audience for the season was at least 60% higher than the previous one. We are confident that the 1998/1999 season provides the variety to attract similar audiences.

As far as choirs during the season are concerned, varying skills and different sizes of choirs are being used, depending on the repertoire. In the case of Bach's B Minor Mass, for example, it is interesting to note that the composer wrote the work for small forces.

This season, school choirs, chamber choirs, the Tallis Scholars (whose concert in February is already sold out), the Cathedral Choir and the Philharmonic Choir are all being used, and as the chairman of

the Philharmonic Choir said in these columns recently (September 4), his choir is "singing even more than usual" during its own very busy forthcoming season.

It is perhaps worth adding that the excellent Guildford Philharmonic season is only one, very significant, strand of the council's support of music.

Grants are given to local music organisations including the Guildford Symphony Orchestra, Guildford Opera Company, Guildford Choral Society and the Classical Road Show.

Popular music including military bands and easy listening concerts are booked by Guildford Civic, a folk and blues programme takes place at the Electric Theatre and the council financially supports the Guildford Folk and Blues Festival in Stoke Park each August.

The borough is fortunate to contain such a breadth of music and I am pleased that the council offers its support to so much of it.

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Don't squeeze choir out

Sir, I fully support the letters from your correspondents Barry Hill (September 25) and Bob Brougham (September 18).

Indeed, one wonders if it is the policy to squeeze the Philharmonic Choir out of existence!

It would seem that the annual carol concert in the Civic Hall is to take place this year on Sunday, December 20, whereas prior to 1997 it had been held, for many years, in early December.

The Sunday before Christmas has become the day upon which many churches hold a carol service; many of us will thus be unable to attend the Civic Hall concert again this year, no doubt to the deep regret of choir members, audience and worshippers respectively.

It is very regrettable that we should be placed in this position.

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