

Music on a grand scale

FOR its concert at Guildford Cathedral on Saturday, the Guildford Philharmonic Choir was joined by the Wooburn singers and their shared conductor, Jeremy Backhouse.

Firstly a fitting tribute was paid to Yehudi Menuhin, who died the day before the concert, and whose famous music school is only a few miles from the cathedral at Stoke d'Abernon.

For what was ostensibly a choral programme, a great deal of responsibility fell on the accompanying orchestra, the Forest Philharmonic, one of this country's best community orchestras which undoubtedly attracts players of an extremely high standard.

Bruckner's Mass in E minor is scored for only wind and brass. The atmosphere of devotional sincerity was well set by the chorus, but against the secure instrumental ensemble, the eight-part choral forces sounded at times rather unwieldy. However, the final plea for peace in the return of the *Kyrie* theme was most confidently and pleasingly achieved in Bruckner's beautiful music.

Mahler's second (*Resurrection*) symphony, which followed, is music on a grand scale lasting for some 85 minutes. In practical terms it needs a very large orchestra. Emotionally, Mahler's embodiment of his struggle with human mortality is enormous.

Mahler's music needs more than accurate note getting. The diminution of dynamics and tempi contrasts in the opening movements allowed only a glimpse of the composer's outrage and grief at the omnipotence of death. But in the climatic fifth movement, when the chorus entered, we were able to share Mahler's vision of another world where an overwhelming love would illuminate our being.

The chorus, with soloists Katy and Jeanette Ager, the orchestra with its dramatic percussion, off-stage band and organ, united in a swathe of glorious sound in the embodiment of the *Resurrection Ode* text 'What thou hast fought shall lead to God'.

Linda Mowat