

Composer in the audience to hear his work performed



A real feast of English music

THE musical director of the Guildford Philharmonic Choir, Jeremy Backhouse pictured left, on the right, with his cousin, the well-known TV personality and composer of *African Sanctus*, David Fanshawe.

David had flown back from the States at the end of an eight-week tour, culminating in a final concert at Carnegie Hall, not only to celebrate Jeremy's birthday on Saturday and the recent birth of his son, but also to be present at the choir's summer concert last Saturday in Guildford Civic.

The opening item was David's recently composed *Fanfare to Planet Earth* and *Millennium March* and he generously gave of his time to discuss the score with the members of the Forest Philharmonic Orchestra before the evening's performance.

WILLIAM Walton's extravagant choral masterpiece, *Belshazzar's Feast*, is a spacious piece of music and seemed an unlikely choice for our modest Guildford Civic. Yet Saturday's performance by the Guildford Philharmonic Choir, and the Vasari Singers worked surprisingly well.

Perhaps realising the limits of the hall's acoustic, conductor Jeremy Backhouse used the composer's alternative scoring, without off-stage brass bands and organ.

With the Vasari singers giving moral and musical support to the Guildford Philharmonic Choir, the resulting choral sound was clear, confident and well-directed.

There was an intimacy to the performance that added rather than subtracted to the work's excitement, the audience being drawn in by the charismatic baritone narrator Robert Rice.

Rice's excellent, very English tonal quality was also ideally suited to the *Five Mystical Songs* by Vaughan Williams heard earlier in the concert.

The well-balanced programme was of works by 20th century English composers. Of these, David Fanshawe is still living and was in the hall to receive the warm applause for his composition *Fanfare to Planet Earth* and *Millennium March* - a rather predictable fanfare and light-

hearted march lacking the grandiloquent trio section we have learned to expect in English marches.

The Forest Philharmonic is a community orchestra, with a few professionals to bolster the ranks. Elgar's nicely phrased *Serenade for Strings* was played with a good depth of sound. The brass and percussion were particularly fine in *Belshazzar's Feast*. The orchestra added vitality and crispness to the whole programme.

Linda Mowat