

Choir sang with incisive accuracy

BRAHMS'S *Requiem* is not a straightforward setting of the Latin liturgical text, rather, the composer chose biblical texts which reflected his own view of the human predicament, coloured as it was by the deaths of his mentor, Schumann, and of his own mother.

The texts are set in a colourful and varied manner, but are never allowed to obscure Brahms's essentially classical approach, heightened by a deliberate use of academic techniques such as the fugue and the canon.

The work therefore calls for a straightforward, unfussy interpretation, which is what it received at the hands of

the Guildford Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra last Saturday. Under the outstanding direction of David Hill, the choir sang with incisive accuracy, and was responsive to every

dynamic nuance.

That every word of the German text came across was not merely the effect of the dry acoustic of Guildford's Civic hall. The orchestral contribution might have been

strengthened by such superb playing as that of oboist Neil Black, but the strings tackled the tricky divisi of the opening movement with sheer professionalism.

Lynda Russell lent a

wonderfully rich tone to her soprano solo, beautifully echoed by the chorus. Stephen Varcoe was a sensitive interpreter, if a little light in vocal quality for a hefty bass role.

Shelagh Godwin

Memorable performance of *Passion*

BACH'S gloriously dramatic *St John Passion* drew an enthusiastic audience to Guildford's Holy Trinity Church last Saturday, for a memorable performance under the assured direction of David Gibson.

The Occam Singers were clear and confident, and it is a measure of their versatility that, in addition to the roles of Peter, Pilate, and servants, selected members very ably undertook almost all the solo arias.

Both guest soloists demonstrated effortless communication, though Stephen Douse, as the Evangelist, experienced intermittent problems of intonation and was thus not so persuasive as Robert Rice's Christus.

Ideally for this venue, the orchestra was very small, just 12 players. Much fine playing here, but not entirely balanced. Whether they were the New London Sinfonia or

New London Baroque Ensemble (information differed), it was a pity not to be told their names, in an otherwise most informative programme booklet.

As always with Occam Singer's concerts, proceeds were offered to charity, on this occasion the Number Five Hostel, the Guildford reception centre for homeless men.

Sebastian Forbes.