
GUILDFORD

Hugo Cole

Blacher requiem

BORIS BLACHER, who died three years ago, has not gone out of fashion because he was never in fashion. London has forgotten him, and it was left to Guildford and to Vernon Handley to celebrate the 75th anniversary of his birth with the first English performance of his Requiem. Blacher is a sort of Bauhaus

composer—the contrapuntal architecture of his Requiem is as clear, clean and functional as that of Swiss or German churches of the Twenties and Thirties. The outer sections are cool yet sensuous in their sparing use of widely-spaced sounds. The vigorous strength of the big central movements can be plainly appreciated in the Civic Hall, where music is dissected out as clearly as at the Festival Hall.

Once or twice, and particularly in the Amen section of the Dies Irae, Blacher's skill leads him to spin out material to dangerous lengths. But his patterning of independent sections—chorus against orchestra, or occasionally chorus against chorus—holds our attention and compels our admiration. He compliments soloists and chorus by sending them on their separate ways, hardly ever supported by the orchestra.

In general, the choir seemed to have got hold of the essence of the work, but were still worried by some of their exposed entries, in which they were led into action by a few bolder spirits. The soloists (Vivien Townley and Ian Caddy and orchestra, hardly missed a trick. This is a requiem in prose rather than in poetry but, as in Bach, there is deep and sincere feeling expressed through fine craftsmanship. A worthwhile revival of a work that should never have lapsed from the repertory.
