

# Memorable concert as Handley bows out

AN important era in the history of Guildford's music came to an end on Saturday when Vernon Handley conducted the final concert in the present season of borough council concerts; a season which is Handley's last as director of music of Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra.

It was a memorable occasion in the Civic Hall. Memorable because the audience gave Handley a standing ovation at the concert's conclusion; because it contained both a first performance of a new work and the first UK appearance of a phenomenal Japanese pianist; and memorable because Guildford's so-called music-lovers managed to anticipate none of the foregoing and thus stayed away in droves.

Never mind. Those who paid their tribute to Handley for 21 years of enlightened music-making will know that they were among genuine enthusiasts. As one member of the audience put it, the "philistines of Guildford" who stayed away missed an event of some moment; better even than *Dynasty*.

Earlier in the day, at the final orchestral practice, Hugh Bean, the orchestra's associate leader, spoke both for the orchestra and the Philharmonic Choir which was seated on the concert platform when he gave a farewell vote of thanks to the conductor.

"The standard of music-making is common knowledge in the music profession and is the envy of many more famously-named organisations," said Bean. When professionals came to Guildford there was, he said, a feeling of making music with friends; there was a high standard of approach and a sense of climax in performance.

"Thank you for so many unforgettable musical experiences," concluded Bean. "Our affection and respect go with you." In a brief reply (after all, rehearsal time with a Musicians' Union orchestra is valuable) Handley was brief but sincere. He spoke of a "colos-

sal sense of privilege to have played with you."

But, the absentees may be asking, did the music live up to the occasion? 'Fraid so, the concert provided a combination of the modern masterpiece and the highly approachable new work.

With due respect to the new work by Adrian Williams — which was a success — it is necessary to turn first to the modern masterpiece, the Piano Concert No. 3 by Bartok, because of the sheer brilliance of the performance.

The name Yuki Nagai-Irizuki may not immediately imprint itself totally on the memory, but here is a pianist of amazing artistry, who will surely play her way to the top.

Her playing of the concerto's second movement, strings barely breathing and the unaccompanied piano then letting each note emerge with its own emphasis and meaning, cast a spell.

Then the more fulsome second section of this movement, generously and wistfully played, followed by a finale of both scintillating detail and a great understanding of the Hungarian richness of sound.

This was superb, exciting playing, whose crispness was echoed by a similarly polished accompaniment from the orchestra.

Brilliance is not, however, the quality that Adrian Williams evidently sought in his

work *Tess*, which was premiered by Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra on Saturday. Based on the character in Thomas Hardy's novel, the music traces *Tess's* emotions — which are complex, wistful and sometimes fatalistic.

It is a composition of moods rather than events, and although the composer says that it has no programme the listener could easily conjure up a series of images with which to accompany what is highly visual music. This visual element arises out of a marvellous use of texture; tone colour created by such unlikely combinations as a soft roll on the cymbal against a sustained string note.

Its content grows and develops from a series of initial ideas and its shape is not unlike an abstract tone poem, although it is sometimes hard to trace the developments back to their source.

The sound itself is highly approachable, good examples being horns and trumpets providing a sinister moment of great effect and, in two or three parts of the work, moments of reconciliation conveyed through chords of romantic and anti-avant-garde beauty.

The orchestra's parts are difficult to play and a great deal of care and time was spent by Handley in the preparation of *Tess*. All this paid off with a

performance of great clarity and sensitivity.

There was sensitivity, too, in the Delius composition, *Appalachia*. Evocative of Delius' time in America's deep south it needs the haunting quality that was evident in the performance.

But Handley also assured an audience of a performance which encapsulated the essence of the negro's tale, the sadness of the war section and a positive feeling of the chorus, sung rousing with clear diction by the harmonic Choir. The baritone soloist was Shimell.

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