

Please think carefully about GPO fare

Sir, May I add some further comments to the correspondence about the 1998/99 programme for the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra?

There were two things that I was particularly looking forward to on my retirement. One was to rejoin the Guildford Philharmonic Choir (if I could still meet the standards required), the other to have a season ticket for the philharmonic programme. It was therefore with great anticipation that I opened the brochure for the new season. Imagine my great disappointment when I found, first that the choir was listed as having only one concert and, likewise, that there was only one full-scale orchestral concert of any merit.

I now know that the choir is still functioning, and has an interesting programme for the season, but sadly has been separated from the GPO programme as such. As I understand it, the choir was specifically formed to work with the orchestra and to give Guildford singers the chance to perform with a first-class orchestra. I hope that these objectives will not be totally abandoned by the borough.

With regard to the orchestra programme, I would agree that changes and economies were needed, together with a refreshment of the programme format. Some scaling down of the scope is probably unavoidable, but what we now have is the virtual abandonment of any attempt to provide a series of serious orchestral concerts in the town.

Lynda Strudwick claims that Guildford is "... in the vanguard of the new thinking on classical concerts ..." I

don't think there is anything radical in staging concerts of many short length "pop" items, collated on the rather tired themes of opera, dance, Vienna and fireworks. In fact, they are often commercially promoted. They have their place, but only alongside concerts with more substantial fare. There must be a balance between the "pop" concerts which it is expected will pull in large audiences, and those that will enlarge our musical appreciation. This season's programme is not so balanced. In my view, Guildford now compares unfavourably with similar size towns, of comparative importance, for provision of professional orchestral concerts.

The letter from Guildford Symphony Orchestra/Surrey Mozart players was disturbingly complacent about this major reduction in the GPO concerts.

However good we amateurs are, we surely all need the inspiration of some first-class professional performances. This is important for the health of all music-making in the town.

Please, Guildford council and the musical management, think carefully about the programme for next season. We are justifiably proud of the theatrical tradition of Guildford, and we used to be proud of the professional music that was provided. The programme does not have to be as extravagant as in the past, but it does have to be more substantial and exciting than this year's poor offering. Give us something that we can again enjoy and be proud of.

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