

Conductor takes over and scores success

THE glories of the classical era as it burst into the even greater glories of the romantic period were splendidly expressed by just two symphonic masterpieces played by the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra at the Civic Hall last night (Sunday).

The most serious and tragic of Mozart's three last great symphonies — No. 40 in G Minor (K. 550) — might well be said to point directly to the immortal peaks of Beethoven's last tremendous symphony — No. 9 (the Choral) — 36 years later.

Despite the sudden absence of Vernon Handley, who had collapsed with ill-health earlier in the day, the G.P.O. were, perhaps as a determined tribute, in magnificent form. Seldom have I heard them so integrated and inspired as in the last two movements of the Beethoven. The religious ecstasy of the Adagio was sheer beauty as expressed by the united strings, with that intense introduction by second violins and violas.

And the grandeurs of the enormous finale, with all sections groping through infinite variations towards the culminating outburst of the Ode to Joy produced ineffable mastery of contrapuntal control and refined phrasing.

The Philharmonic Choir also rose nobly and with infectious enthusiasm to the challenging strain of Beethoven's "instrumental" writing for voices in their highest register. There was no shrieking, the tone was almost without exception warm and well-rounded, the line steady and the stamina unflinching.

The triumph of the evening belonged to John Forster, who stepped in at only a few hours' notice to take the baton of Mr. Handley. Himself a member of the orchestra, and a knowl-

edgeable and experienced musician in his own right, he conducted this taxing programme with no unnecessary fuss but with clear direction and most attractive attention to delicacy of nuance with his expressive left hand.

He never allowed the remorseless uphill drive of the Beethoven to carry the orchestra away until its proper climax in the terrific prestissimo, obtained exquisite contrast in the short pastoral relief from stress in the Scherzo, and precise patterns in the fugal passages. The tempestuous 36-bar timpani of the first movement was as exiting as ever.

The four soloists maintained the high orchestral and choral standards. Although John Tomlinson struck a rather hard, powerful, tone in his initial declamation of "Freunde, he settled down to a richer delivery in company with the others. The soprano, Yara Labal, was another replacement, as Vivien Townley, was indisposed, and she appeared understandably nervous in some of her early entries. She has a sweet-toned voice, however, and her top notes came over well. John Kingsley Smith managed his one tenor solo with lyrical purity, and Helen Attfield amply fulfilled the contralto requirements.

To the average listener, Mozart is not remembered for eloquent sorrow, but the fatalistic drama and occasionally vigorous urgency of his G Minor Symphony is perhaps his greatest essay in the mood. Even the Minuet has its bitter dissonances, though beautifully relieved by the serenity of the Trio.

Once again the G.P.O. strings presented a brilliant example of team-work, expertly led by John Ludlow, the tone of the cellos in particular possessing a deeply glowing quality. I noticed that the work was performed in its original form, without clarinets, which may have removed a certain stability from the woodwind. — J. C. D.