

✓ ST. DAVID'S HALL, CARDIFF
(October 4th, 1984)

BBC WELSH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Jacek Kasprzyk (conductor); Kathleen Livingstone (soprano); Richard Morton (tenor); Stephen Roberts (baritone); Ardwyn Singers; Cardiff Polyphonic Choir; Dyfed Choir.

What a variable group the BBC Welsh Orchestra is. Not only can they sound different in quality from conductor to conductor but even within a concert their playing can vary a great deal in terms of intonation, ensemble and tone.

Only a short time previously the BBCWSO had performed magnificently under Sir Charles Groves. This raises the issue of the level the orchestra could consistently achieve had they the opportunity to be directed by a permanent conductor who also had ability as an orchestra builder.

But, alas, the reality of the situation is akin to the story told to me by another critic who once asked Vernon Handley how many concerts he was conducting during the current year with a certain orchestra.

Handley replied, 'Oh, I've actually got *ten* concerts with them this season. Don't laugh', he admonished my friend, 'it could have been much fewer, I could have been appointed the principal conductor!'

Indeed.

The variability of this orchestra's playing under Kasprzyk threw into relief their achievements under Groves. During Kasprzyk's concert the performance of Orff's *Carmina Burana* was the most successful event of the evening. Yet for all the glorious sound of massed choir and orchestra in full cry there were continual nagging imprecisions in ensemble and it seemed that far too many entries, cut-offs or tempo changes needed a beat to resolve themselves.

Nonetheless, Orff's clever and persuasive score came over as powerfully and as fresh as ever.

Without being particularly distinguished the soloists did not let the music down, with Stephen Roberts presenting a characterful if under-powered interpretation of the baritone part.

The playing of Kodály's *Háry János* which opened the concert was slipshod and lacking in bite and élan.

From the surprisingly fast and uninflected first bar, the performance of the 'Adagio' from Mahler's *Symphony No. 10* was a travesty of what is part of one of the most sublime masterpieces of the romantic symphonic literature.

Not only is the playing of the 'Adagio' as a lollipop separated from its context of questionable value, but the movement was played as though the conductor had never heard the work before, let alone understood it, and the players performed as though they had never seen their parts before.

IFAN PAYNE.