

Llandaff Cathedral Festival

Elgar helps lift a dull day

By IFAN PAYNE

GOLFERS may have had their day dampened by swamping rain, but at 7.30pm on the dot last evening the clouds parted and the sun smiled briefly through the clerestory windows of Llandaff Cathedral.

The occasion was Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra's performance of Elgar's *Enigma Variations* continuing the Llandaff Festival.

Although Cardiff does not appear to have nurtured a conductor of more than routine competence in symphonic music, Michael Bell did lead a thoroughly pleasant reading of Elgar's ubiquitous but ever-fresh score.

However, the pause after *Nimrod* which, like the commercial breaks on ITV produces a false emphasis in the flow of the surrounding programme, did give an inappropriate sense of misplaced climax to the work.

The CPO may be an amateur orchestra composed of youthful players, but the incisive and committed playing of the opening of Holst's *The Planets* and much of the subsequent suite dispelled any thoughts of the need to make allowances.

This was full blooded orchestral playing with the brass clearly instructed to take no prisoners.

The performance ostensibly ended with a nicely judged, if awkwardly

pitched, coup de theatre in which the disembodied celestial chorus retreated into the nether spaces of the cathedral.

Whereupon Michael Bell peered through his telescope, and anachronistically discovered on behalf of Holst an eighth planet. Low and behold it was Jupiter spun out of its orbit and repositioned beyond Neptune.

The aforementioned golfers could prop their arms on the bar and drown their sorrows.

The viewers have to attempt to curb their exasperation at the fact that not only did this ruin the effect created by the chorus, but made a nonsense of the composer's musical vision.

Reviews