

Festival Vistas anew

STANISLAW SKROWACZEWSKI came to prominence with his appointment with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra in 1960. He came to the attention of a wider audience 10 years later with the publication of a superb box of Ravel's orchestral music on the Vox label.

Skrowaczewski took up his duties last month as the new principal conductor of the Halle Orchestra. There was an opportunity to hear what may be in store from this new team when the Halle Orchestra, with pianist Jen-Bernard Pommier, presented a programme on Monday evening as part of the Swansea Festival in the Brangwyn Hall.

The concert opened with a work for this very festival almost a decade ago — William Matthias's *Vistas*, Opus 69.

The work was inspired by a visit to the United States but other than fleeting reminders of Ives, the work is not, as the composer admits in his programme note, in any sense programmatic.

The orchestra under Skrowaczewski gave a disciplined performance

By IFAN PAYNE

of this sonically colourful music.

Jen-Bernard Pommier approached his piano as if to box ten rounds with it for the world championship but once seated and underway he displayed a flair and panache that was ideally suited to Skrowaczewski's brazen and rumbustious reading of Liszt's *Piano Concerto No 2*. The orchestra carried the work by force, as it were, rather than by subtlety but there was no doubting the rousing quality of the performance.

I understand that Vladimir Ashkenazy hand-picked the new £24,000 concert grand. All that care went for naught when the second (orchestral) piano was left on stage with its top up for the duration of the concerto.

The fine acoustics of the Brangwyn Hall came into their own for the final work, the *Symphony No 10* of Shostakovich. The demands of the music may have shown up some of the weaknesses of the Halle winds and string ensemble. The power of the work made as big an impression as ever in Skrowaczewski's vigorous account.