

Japanese wow audience

By IFAN PAYNE

IF I knew the Japanese for "Wow!" I'd say it out loud right now.

The occasion for this excitement was the concert in St David's Hall yesterday evening given jointly by the Cwmbran Male Choir and the Kwansai Gakuin Glee Club.

The Kwansai Gakuin University was founded in Kobe in 1889 and the Glee Club was formed 10 years later, which makes it the oldest male voice choir in Japan.

It is worth noting that the university appears to have no music department, in that none of the singers in this superb choir was a music student.

REVIEW

The Cwmbran Choir opened the concert under their conductor Mr Gareth Whitcombe, who was also the programme's presenter.

The Kwansai Choir followed and the impact made by their singing could be judged by the tumultuous applause that broke out from the audience long before the end of their first selection.

The most notable work presented by the Japanese was *The Bells*, composed by Mr Tokuhide Niimi especially for the choir's present tour which is a complex work

of slow-moving chordal writing based on Po's poem of the same name.

The performance was a stunning tour de force. Mr Whitcombe said, "The Cwmbran Male Voice Choir are going to try and follow that."

And for all the verve and the lovely soft legato of the Welsh chorus, I know they will understand if I allot more space to the fine singing of the Japanese choir.

The performance of the lovely excerpts from the *Missa Solemnis* by Paul

Creston, an affecting but unsentimental work, was exceptionally noteworthy.

After three virtuoso sea shanties, Japanese-style, the formal part of the concert ended with three Schubert songs.

These were sung in German to add to the Japanese, English and Latin of this linguistically-agile and vocally-impressive chorus.

As I said, a Japanese "Wow!" to the Kwansai Gakuin Glee Club.