

✓ ST. DAVID'S HALL, CARDIFF
(February 21st, 1984)

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Conductor: James Loughran

Soloists: Emmy Verhey (violin), Igor Oistrakh (violin and viola)

This concert was one in a series presented in memory of the great Russian violinist, David Oistrakh, the tenth anniversary of whose death occurs this year. Unfortunately another memory, this time of the rather poor concert given here by the LPO a short while ago kept some regular concertgoers away from St. David's Hall but there were enough others to fill the auditorium almost to capacity. The fears of the former, though, threatened to be realised with the announcement that owing to illness both conductor Vernon Handley and violinist Valery Oistrakh had to be replaced 'at short notice' by James Loughran and Emmy Verhey.

Now, there is short notice and short notice, and the announcement made from the stage before the start of the concert did not make clear whether or not Mr. Loughran and Ms. Verhey had had an opportunity to rehearse with the orchestra. If they had, then it would be just another normal day's work except, perhaps, for some forced travelling . . . after all, the programme was humdrum enough that all concerned could play in it in their sleep if need be.

The opening movement of the opening work, Beethoven's *Symphony No. 4* suggested that there had been rehearsal and that the stay-aways may have been right. After an opening that was taut in structure and played with intensity, the performance lapsed into what can only be described as competent late twentieth-century middle European generalised symphonic playing. You know the sort of thing . . . where in a blind test it becomes difficult to tell a routine Mehta from an Abbado from Maazel from Loughran, and the auditorium is awash in Beethoven as aural wallpaper. Other than to pass the time, no reason for performing this work (rather than any other) was being communicated. There is a difference between playing the notes and performing the music and this play-through was not worthy of the memory of Oistrakh père.

Mozart's lovely *Sinfonia Concertante in E flat for Violin, Viola and Orchestra* started out with a steady pulse and a lovely, controlled entry by the soloists who emerged beautifully into the musical traffic. Thereafter the performance teetered on the fine line between raptness and self-indulgence before finally oozing out of its musical structure at the end of the second movement.

To be fair, it must be said that from my seat (Tier 8, row E) the sound of the solo viola was reduced to a whisper and it seemed that the seemingly silken, but thin, tone of Ms. Verhey's violin did not carry well either, so that it is impossible to say much about the quality of the solo playing.

It is, though, possible to say that from this seat the lack of sound from the soloists was more than compensated for by the noise of the air conditioning system (I use the term in its technical sense of denoting a system that conditions the air, whether it be heating cooling or cleaning) which was most obtrusive, having both a low frequency component (which was headache-enducing) and an annoying machine-rattle component.

Igor Oistrakh exchanged viola for violin for the performance of the

Brahms Violin Concerto and with it injected some much needed fire into the proceedings. The Russian violinist clearly sees the work as an exuberant one, and this attitude coupled with the rhythmic vigour of his playing sprayed freshness and a sense of purpose upon the event.

As an encore, Mr. Oistrakh performed the *Caprice No. 24* by Paganini and thereby demonstrated that he lacks nothing at all of his father's technique. His bowing is well controlled and the playing of harmonics is exceptionally clean, with only the difficult flying spiccato/left hand pizzicato combination ruffling the surface of his security. Not only was his father called to mind, but, in its big toned security, the performance also brought to mind the playing of the great and tragically short lived American, Michael Rabin.

This, finally, was indeed a fitting tribute to the artistry and memory of David Oistrakh.