

ST. DAVID'S HALL, CARDIFF  
(March 27, 1984)

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Norman Del Mar

The final concert in this year's Cardiff Festival of Choirs, it featured the combined Cardiff Polyphonic and Swansea Bach choirs as well as soloists Sheila Armstrong, Helen Watts, Stuart Burrows and Christopher Keyte.

Choirs are generally not noted for their adventurousness with regard to the music that is chosen for them to sing but in this case neither of the two main works are performed often and the prospect was for an interesting evening.

Bruckner's *Te Deum* started life as an organ piece that the composer improvised in church on Easter Sunday, 1881. Bruckner started to sketch the work later that same year but it was not finished until March of 1884. The *Te Deum* is one of his last choral and religious works and it became one of his most popular. Interestingly, the work was composed before and after the *Symphony No. 7* so it is not surprising, perhaps, that the same theme was used for both the 'Non confundar' section of the choral work and for the *adagio* of the symphony.

The *Te Deum* is a striking work, with the great striding phrases of the first section and the wonderful step-wise phrases of 'In Gloria' making a particularly powerful effect.

Schubert's *Mass in A♭* on the other hand is the work of a far younger man; the composer was 25 years old when he completed the Mass in 1882. It is a pity that Schubert's choral works are relatively slow to be re-discovered. The *A♭*, like the G major Mass, is an attractive, fresh work that in its small scale and more straightforward melodic invention stands

in sharp contrast to the large-scale power of the Bruckner. But there are moments in the Schubert — the sombre tread of *Crucifixus*, the crescendo full of mystery to *Tu solus* and the lightly tripping accompanying figure on the 'celli during *et vitam venturi saeculi* — that catch and hold the attention through their dramatic effect.

The choir sang Schubert's lovely Mass with precision and attractive tone, as did the soloists, with Sheila Armstrong in particular making a special effort to convey the deep feeling of the music. Norman Del Mar kept matters moving along attractively enough.

Despite the impact of the chorus during the *Te Deum*, Mr. Del Mar's interpretation was generally pedestrian with seemingly little effort to invest the music with meaning beyond the presentation of the notes.

The concert opened with a performance of Beethoven's overture to *Fidelio* which was well played but which had little relationship to the rest of the programme.