

✓ ST. DAVID'S HALL, CARDIFF
(September 29th, 1984)

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

Carlo Maria Giulini (conductor).

As an object lesson in how beautifully strings can sound, this concert was superb.

As an object lesson in how to refine the melodic line of a symphony, this concert was also superb.

As interpretations of Brahms's Second and Fourth Symphonies the concert was both provocative and enthralling.

There was no doubt whatsoever about Giulini's skill in shaping the orchestra and music to his vision. From the merest whisper of a pianissimo to the loudest fortissimo, this was an exceptional display of orchestral technique. But the very opening of the Second Symphony, taken at a slow and even tempo, also foretold the dilemma to come.

The interpretation was very much a stately, surface view of the music. What the interpretations lacked, at least for me, was the perception of any inner fire burning within the music and of any sense of a forward moving pulse . . .

. . . . stasis at the heart of music.

Lovely, yes, but sterile . . . perhaps that is too strong a word . . . but I found myself admiring the music and the performance rather than being caught up in it and being swept away by the musical argument.

Perhaps it was the sense of unruffled geniality? Perhaps the lack of

concern for inner voices? — not from the point of view of counter melody, but for the interplay of rhythms and inner lines. Perhaps because Giulini seemed concerned only with the melodic line for its own sake and not for where it led or how it acted against the beat.

And always at the major incidents the music fell backwards rather than propelling itself forward.

The music unfolded seamlessly before you but (paradoxically perhaps) as a static aesthetic experience rather than a dynamic intellectual challenge . . . inspirational, beautiful but introspectively, leading nowhere.

Clearly a fascinating musical experience, with the Philharmonia sounding gorgeous and Giulini polishing the music to produce the divine moment rather than presenting it as an essential element in a continuing musical adventure.