

Welsh extravaganza

by IFAN PAYNE

IT MAY have been dreary and raining outside, but inside St David's Hall, Cardiff last night the gentlemen and ladies of the Halle Orchestra were sporting wide smiles, red carnations and shirt sleeves.

There has not been a prom season in Cardiff and London's proms are only just beginning, yet the event which prompted this relaxed, festive display was, if you can believe it, a Last Night of the Proms End of Season Extravaganza.

At hand, in addition to the Halle, to entertain were the Cwmbach and Treorchy male voice choirs and leading this paradox of an event was Owain Arwel Hughes.

Many of the traditional prom features were also present, including Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstances No 1* and Henry Wood's *Fantasia on British Sea Songs*.

Despite the fact that Elgar himself abhorred the words to his music, these provided ample opportunity for audience participation and the hall

does look attractive when festooned from top tier to stage with streamers.

Yet among all this post-Falkland sea-ruling and flag-waving there were also several notable musical moments. These included an opportunity to hear both the marvellous orchestral inventiveness of Hoddinott's *Celebration Dances* and also a part of Prokofiev's majestic and brilliant *Romeo and Juliet* score.

The playing of the orchestra had more spirit than sense of ensemble, but the combined choruses brought to the concert more controlled cohesiveness with their singing of Ieuan Reed-Davies's *Close Thine Eyes* and John Hughes's *Arwelfa*.

Owain Arwel Hughes is just the man for a stand-and-cheer session and his exhortation for Live Aid St David's Hall was a suitably rabble-rousing conclusion to this fantasy extravaganza.

Now all we need is a proms to precede this last night of it.