

Echoes of Elgar

By IFAN PAYNE

COMPARED to its two predecessors, the third symphony of Carl Nielsen, *Sinfonia Espansiva* is characterised by a significant step forward from the sounds of Brahms towards a more personal tonality.

This symphony is also notable for the opening unison chords which plunge purposefully forward into a rhythmically lively movement. To our ears the broad opening theme of the final allegro must strike echoes of Elgar's many *Nobilmente* passages.

Tuesday's performance of the *Sinfonia Espansiva* performed by the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra under Howard Williams was the third in St David's Hall's excellent lunchtime series, which includes all of Nielsen's symphonies.

Mr Williams beautifully captured the waltz rhythm which is at the heart of the symphony's first movement and was at his best in the several strict tempo *tranquillo* sections.

The orchestra was at its

best in the scything chords which open the coda to that movement, at the end of which the mood the playing and music had generated amongst the audience was quite tangible.

The andante was a beautifully-painted deep pool of tranquillity and here, as throughout, Howard Williams had caught the peculiar paradoxical introspective and extroverted quality of Nielsen's music.

Haydn's *Symphony No 30* was a pretty enough little piece of trelliswork alongside Nielsen's magnificent structure and it was played with spirited rhythms and a light touch, though its tone remained unrelentingly string-dominated.

For each one of these lunchtime concerts the audience has become more numerous. There must surely be hope that the hall will be filled to capacity by the time we get to the sixth and final symphony.

Meanwhile the next performance in this series, which is not to be missed, will be at lunchtime on Friday, 6th March.

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