

carried out at night on January 10.

Absentees fail to see the light

By IFAN PAYNE

REVIEW

IT is right that the Welsh National Opera present popular concerts of light and attractive music in order to fill St David's Hall and therefore help defray the financial burdens of both hall and opera company.

These concerts serve also to attract a wider audience to the New Theatre for the real thing.

It was surprising then, on Thursday evening, to find the auditorium of St David's Hall half empty. This is all the more a pity when realising that with the recent resignation of Richard Armstrong from the post of musical director we are hearing what must be among his last concerts with the opera orchestra.

In order to succeed in this type of popular concert on any level other than as a money-spinner, the performers have to take the music seriously however light and inconsequential it may be.

Unfortunately, the first half sounded somewhat like a sight-reading session and rather too much Manglais was to be heard.

Manglais, you will remember, is the garbled and impenetrable language of singers who cannot handle vowels and

consonants at the same time.

Helen Field sang Cantelobe's atmospheric and delightful *Songs From The Auvergne* with a steady line and well-produced tone if also with an all-purpose interpretive smile.

Arthur Davies also smiles at the end of Massenet's *Pourquoi Me Reveiller?* Presumably the smile was one of relief at having got through the aria without mishap.

The second half of the concert came to life with some fine conducting from Richard Armstrong which made the evening worthwhile.

At first though, it seemed as though Helen Field's well-produced but small voice was wrong for the role of Tatyana. She lacks the tonal variety and dynamic range.

But the performance of the letter scene from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* took wing from the central horn solo onwards.

Miss Fields was superb in the quiet and moving central passage and the orchestra flowered gloriously in its subsequent outburst.