

**BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra
at St David's Hall**

Nielsen at his best — even with a hint of Elgar

By IFAN PAYNE

REVIEW

OLE Schmidt conducted the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra yesterday in the second of St David's Hall's magnificent series of lunchtime Nielsen concerts.

Both *Pomp and Circumstance No 1* and *Cockaigne* had been completed the year before Nielsen's second symphony so it is not surprising perhaps that this is his most Elgarian symphony.

The work was given the title *The Four Temperaments* which indicated that the composer based each movement on a series of pictures he had seen which depicted the four human temperaments.

The choleric first movement set fourth with a suitable swagger but sloppy balances blurred the essential clarity of instrumental lines. From then on, though, matters improved considerably and the gentle sway of the phlegmatic waltz was nicely captured.

It is, perhaps, in the central, towering, melancholic andante that Nielsen's voice is at its most distinctive, and also where the orchestra was at its

rich-toned best. Indeed, there was heroic playing throughout from the orchestra in response to Ole Schmidt's satisfying and convincing interpretation.

In the performance of Haydn's *Symphony No 22* (The Philosopher) with which the concert began, Schmidt ignored the highly contrasted dynamic markings of the opening and presented an elegantly-bland movement rather than one with a gravity appropriate to the title, and subsequently at a weightwatchers tempo the minuet was a dance for the over-weight.

Only the nattering final presto found the right character for this music.

No matter. These concerts exhibit inspired programming — a most welcome antidote to the umpteenth routine performance of yet another Tchaikovsky suite — and an investment in an audience that will surely pay dividends in the future.

The next instalment of this superb series will be at lunchtime on February 10.