

# No surprises in this show of musical discipline

By IFAN PAYNE

THE quiet, steadily paced and superbly balanced chording of the Philharmonia Orchestra playing Wagner's *Tannhauser Overture* under Giuseppe Sinopoli at St David's Hall on Tuesday evening was a demonstration of disciplined orchestral playing.

Every bow and every breath was well judged and meticulously controlled, as were the emotions communicated, so that the potential for an equal emotional response was also controlled.

There were no surprises, no hidden worlds laid open for us to wonder at in a meticulous, but unmoving performance in which the orchestra actually sounded underpowered at the climax.

The same self-contained quality encompassed the start of Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No 3* whose naked allegro seemed self-consciously shorn of its brio.

Soberness was prevented from subsiding into tedium by John Lill's rhapsodic and lovingly toned piano playing and, whatever one might think of the transformation of the operatic aria of the largo into a substitute soundtrack for *Elvira Madigan*,

## REVIEWS

there was no doubting the sheer ethereal beauty of the pianism.

Lill's appropriately perky playing was a feature of the final rondo, but Sinopoli seemed unable to allow the music to smile, let alone to dance and laugh as it should.

That meticulousness of balance and control which had so inhibited the interpretations of

the preceding works enabled Sinopoli to clarify the complex strands of Berg's *Lulu Suite* and in understating the more overly neurotic aspects of the music allowed the lyricism and romanticism a fuller expression.

Yet that romanticism remained cool and dispassionate — here was one prolific lover who was not going to have her emotions portrayed as being out of control, a self-control which extended to her death-throes. In this vision Sinopoli was well supported by soprano Julia Conwell.