

Avanti at St Donat's Castle**Stimulating
performance
by orchestra**

By IFAN PAYNE

REVIEW

OUT-VOTED in a decision to stay out of town, I was unavoidably detained and thus missed Avanti's opening concert of this year's Vale of Glamorgan Festival.

However, I caught up with this excellent chamber orchestra since it also performed the festival's second concert which (after an hour's delay because of an unfortunate motor accident) was given on Tuesday evening in the Bradenstoke Hall at St Donat's Castle.

The much-heralded young Finnish conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen led the orchestra in a stimulating and wide-ranging programme, largely devoted to the music of his native country.

The sweet-toned and affecting performance of the opening work, Sibelius's *Rakastava*, belied both the trauma of the bus accident and the youth of this talented orchestra.

Salonen's equally stimulating conducting belied not only his youth but also that he conducts much of the time with his eyes closed.

The compositional interest surely lay in Merikanto's nobly and uncompromising *Nonet* and in Magnus Lindberg's densely-layered, frenetic

Rittrato (a British premiere), both of which are relatively unknown and both of which were enthusiastically and vigorously played.

But the over-riding interest was in Esa-Pekka Salonen's treatment of Schoenberg's masterpiece of tone painting, *Verkl aerte Nacht*, here given in its chamber orchestra version.

Wearing his heart on his sleeve, Salonen showed himself to be a conductor of great sensitivity, not only shaping the music most lovingly but also conveying the fevered emotional intensity of the two benighted protagonists.

In a glowing performance of romantic richness full of superbly-weighted and balanced chords, he showed that he has the ability to convey a combination of phrasing and underlying rhythmic energy (slow pulsed as well as fast) which goes towards making him one of the most exciting conductors of his young generation.