

ST. DAVID'S HALL, CARDIFF
(March 11, 1983)

WARSAW PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Kazimierz Kord.

Soloist: Piotr Paleczny (piano)

On paper, at least, there did not at first seem to be too much in common between the works on the programme presented by this visiting orchestra. In the event, though, this enthralling concert turned out not only to have a strong and fascinating aural and thematic thread but also to be a well performed and attractive event.

What the three works — Elgar's *In the South*; Chopin's *Piano Concerto No. 2* and Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10* — had in common was easier to hear than to read about. All three works concern, or are descriptive of, a person: Elgar in Alassio, Chopin's paean to a singer at the Warsaw Conservatory and Shostakovich's portrait of Stalin. Two of the works have prominent militaristic passages: Elgar's Roman legions and Shostakovich's jackbooted marches. All three works are expressive of quiet amongst turmoil and, finally, the three works are all orchestrally colourful, each in its own way displaying a wide range of orchestral timbres.

Kazimierz Kord is an experienced conductor who is particularly renowned for his work in the opera house. Indeed, the last time that I heard him conduct, it was at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York leading a performance of *Boris Godunov*.

This operatic experience was noticeable in particular during the performance in St. David's Hall of Chopin's *Piano Concerto in F minor* which he treated as an operatic work in which he led a pit orchestra, as it were, in accompaniment to the singing soloist — here impersonated by the pianist Piotr Paleczny. This approach worked well, with the orchestra contributing beautifully delicate moments of accompaniment. The *Larghetto* in particular was most sensitively phrased by the strings. Despite the virtuosity and security of the pianist, however, he did not seem to be listening to the

orchestra so that his contribution tended to be overloud and insensitive. Mr. Paleczny seemed at his happiest when he could cut loose and play with panache and rhythmic vigour.

If the pianist might be said to be impersonating an opera singer, then it was no demure soprano, but an Italianate tenor of the stand and belt style of singing.

The lyricism which was such a notable feature of the orchestral playing under Mr. Kord was heard to good effect also in Elgar's *Concert Overture: In the South*. For those who know their recordings, one might say that the interpretation leaned towards Boult more than towards the cut and thrust of Silvestri. It is, of course, a perfectly valid approach, though I did rather miss the excitement that can be generated by the work. The Romans here tended to be in stately purple rather than a-glint with steel. But this is a personal preference: the reading of what is one of Elgar's most colourful and wholly successful works was full of sympathy, warmth and lyricism.

By the interval of the concert it was clear that the Warsaw Philharmonic is a well disciplined and warm sounding orchestra. After the interval it became equally clear that this orchestra is also a virtuosic ensemble.

Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93* is very much a portrait of the Stalinist era composed upon the death of that tyrant, and the second movement is a brutal portrait of the man himself. There can not be a more nasty portrait in all of music and the Warsaw Philharmonic played to such great effect that the audience let out an audible communal gasp at the final chord of the movement.

What was notable in this performance, as it had been in both the Elgar and the Chopin, was the clarity of structure achieved by the conductor and the security, tonal control and precision of the orchestral playing. Added to this was the positive characterization of each passage of the music without ever losing the sense of that structure. Throughout the concert Mr. Kord elicited from the orchestra phrasing of sensitivity (the one notable lapse was the slightly 'cool' viola solo during the *nocturne* of *In the South*), with rubato, but yet he never lost his grip on the form and structure of the music. He allowed the listener to admire the aural details without ever losing sight of the architecture.

The performance of the Shostakovich was as strong and committed in its effect as is this searing score itself.

The Warsaw Philharmonic are also blessed with having as a cymbalist a character who can use his instrument to itch his nose or to play with a rare flair that contributed as much to the pleasure of the evening as did the attractively costumed (in traditional Polish style) presenters of bouquets.