

BELFAST

Festival '66 (Nov 11-26) consolidated the achievement of its predecessors. Unlike them, it had fewer spectacular highlights but a more even level and, as a result, a more consistently high box-office pattern. Indeed, by the opening, ticket sales were up by 40% on 1965 and at the end of it all the director, Michael Emmerson, was enthusiastic about the prospects of support for Festival '67 and that in spite of a freeze which in Northern Ireland has amounted to a serious blizzard.

There were of course many visiting performers, such as Katchen, the Philharmonia Hungarica, Cleo Laine, the Guarneri Quartet, Stan Getz, Astrud Gilberto and so on. But the main musical emphasis turned out to be on local musical forces; and there is a strong feeling that the existence of this Festival is stimulating local music round the year, unlike so many whose existence seems to kill all musical interest outside their seasons.

Festival 65 was notable for launching Raymond Warren's Symphony and Quartet. This time, the opening concert introduced his new Violin Concerto, played by Erich Gruenberg with the BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra under its permanent conductor, Terence Lovett. It seemed characteristic of Warren's sensitivity to purpose that he should start a violin concerto with not only a seminal phrase for the soloist, but a singing one that is, as it were, a manifesto for the lyrical instrument.

The first movement is a dialogue between solo and strings. The second is a memorial elegy in which solo and wind (especially brass) speak alternately, but not in converse. The rondo is the one complex, demanding movement. The cadenzas are especially gratefully written for the instrument, but the whole effect of the work is so admirably a concerto, and it so clearly evoked Mr Gruenberg's full sympathy and understanding, that it should travel far.

It seems that this Festival will be a permanency, and an instance of what a university can do to stimulate the entire culture of the community it serves.

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