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LONDON PHIL IN SIBELIUS

PRECISION PLAYING

The second concert of the London Philharmonic Orchestra's festival of music in conjunction with C.E.M.A. brought a much bigger audience to the Ulster Hall on Thursday evening.

It also yielded a far greater degree of enjoyment. Not only was there a finer precision in the playing under the conductorship of Erich Leinsdorf, there was also a greater vitality as well as warmth in the tone to give a finer effect to the playing, and by no means least so when a singing style was demanded.

The programme itself was, too, more ambitious in its scope, having for its main feature the Sibelius Symphony No.5 in E flat, a work which had not previously been performed in Belfast, so far as I remember, and a special word of praise must go to the promoters for giving us an opportunity to hear this masterpiece at first hand.

It was also fitting that this work, besides being the most significant music in the programme, should prove to be the most memorable performance of the evening. There was always a finely informed control in the playing here, with a comprehensive sweep that carried the work to a climax that was both convincing and grand in its effect. The fact that there was a certain squareness in the rhythm at times was by no means a defect in this music, as it had so often been in the Brahms symphony the previous afternoon, for it was quite in keeping with the composer's style, and underlined, without unduly emphasising, his essential ruggedness.

I liked, particularly the last two of its three movements, the one, far more an allegretto than an andante, giving a charmingly beautiful example of Sibelius's geniality, the other, an allegro of tremendous force, which is perhaps even more typical of his general style. That is to say, it is largely based on a theme which at first sounds commonplace when given out by the horns, but soon proves to have harmonic implications of great originality which come with increasing effect as the movement develops. These sections were handled with a particularly admirable grip, and even by themselves would have made the performance an unusually stimulating experience. The same composer's *Swan of Tuonela* which preceded the symphony, was not, I thought, on quite the same plane as a performance, though it is equally beautiful in itself. Its lovely cor anglais solo was sensitively played, and the work ended on a note of true eloquence. But the mood in the earlier part was not always genuinely poetic.

The concert opened with the *Flying Dutchman* Overture, a performance which gave full effect to the sonority of Wagner's scoring for the brass, though it hardly attained the vital accent of the later playing in other respects. Vitality was always in evidence in Dvořák's *Symphonic Variations* on an original theme, the main work in the second part of the programme, and this performance, like that of the symphony, showed the powers of the orchestra in their best light. The work in itself does not, of course, move to such great issues. But there is an imaginative quality in its invention as well as great beauty in its effect.

Besides that, it has the essential merit of moving to a climax, and the conductor's appreciation of constructive requirements was never more admirably in evidence than in this work. The remaining works – the *Adagietto* from Mahler's Fifth Symphony and the *Waltz* from *Der Rosenkavalier*, did not appeal to me so greatly, though the one was not without eloquence and the other had a certain sensuous beauty of effect.

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