

Belfast Telegraph review, dated 7 October 1983.

My copy has been carefully cut out and preserved – but it doesn't include the usual 'Rathcol' credit. Nor indeed does it specify *Belfast Telegraph* – but the style looks as if it's so!

A splendid beginning

No concert season could have had a more auspicious send-off than did the first Ulster Orchestra concert of the new series last night.

Sold out even before the Ulster Hall opened its doors, a long queue of hopefuls awaiting returned tickets told its own story.

I am told that the same situation obtained in Omagh on the previous night and inside the hall there was a feeling of excitement and warmth that showed how much the joint contributions of Bryden Thomson and the orchestra are now valued.

The fine, meaty programme began with a stirring account of the Prelude to Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, with the twelve brass adding an often thrilling impact to the performance. The performance was broadcast and I wonder how the strings came across to listeners at home, since they were at times at a disadvantage in the hall. Nevertheless, an appropriate sense of pomp and circumstance that makes one wish that Scottish Opera would bring their acclaimed performance of this wonderful opera here.

The centrepiece was Rachmaninov's third piano concerto, with John Lill as soloist. Always a welcome visitor here, many tend to associate him largely with the music of Beethoven, but this fine account of a splendid work proved how wide and commanding his sympathies are.

This was a performance which indeed enhanced his already high standing, and one could see what it was that so impressed the Russians as an interpreter of their music.

Negotiating the formidable difficulties with deceptive ease, in addition to superb keyboard control and command of bravura, he displayed an intuitive feeling for both the eloquence and romantic surge of the music. The lyrical aspects were splendidly cared for, the cadenzas were dispatched with aplomb, and he gauged the mounting intensity of the finale splendidly.

In short, this was a most impressive account of music that admits of no half measures, and it is no understatement to say that Bryden Thomson and his players deservedly shared in the enthusiastic plaudits the performance evoked.

The symphony was the Sibelius first, and I fully approve of Thomson's approach. Nothing was overdone in this committed performance, the perspective was well thought out and the music was allowed to make its natural impact. The oblique allusions to Russian influences were never overdone, and every section of the orchestra, with the strings in pristine form, contributed to the over-all satisfaction the performance generated.

Incidentally, Lill gives a piano recital in the Elmwood Hall at 7.30 tonight.