

Choral society earn chorus of disapproval

WOODBRIDGE CHORAL Society has a large following and the town's Community Hall was full for its concert "A Night at the Opera" on Saturday evening.

This caused problems as there were not enough seats for latecomers. Consequently the first two items on the programme were interrupted by shufflings and whisperings as organisers brought in a bench to seat the overflow. There's none so noisy as those trying to be quiet!

The programme took us on a tour of the musical capitals of Europe, but rarely managed to capture the essence of the operatic excerpts performed.

Woodbridge Chamber Orchestra, conducted by John Penny, began the proceedings with the Overture from Wagner's "Mastersingers" but were never happy with it. Intonation was poor, even taking into account the warm, muggy atmosphere in the hall, timing was sloppy and it was obvious they had bitten off more than they could chew.

The same was true, unfortunately, for the second Wagner excerpt in which the

orchestra was joined by the choir for the "Grand March and entry of the Guests" from Tannhauser. The orchestra was so overpowering that the voices were drowned.

Bizet's "The Toreador's Song", in which Jeremy Bristol (baritone) sang the solo to good effect and Mascagni's "Easter Hymn" showed the choir's capabilities but again, they found contending with the orchestra too much.

Charming

If the choral society is to continue using this hall, with its delayed acoustic, more attention needs to be paid to balancing the forces. The three rows of sopranos and altos were all on the same level so the voices of those at the back were lost. If they could be tiered, projection would be improved. Also, the orchestra needs toning down, particularly the percussion. It needs to be effective, but not to the exclusion of all else.

This is not to say, however, that there were no bright moments. A group of Viennese pieces, conducted with nice economy of gesture by Alan Fairley, were bright and lively. Soprano soloist

Elsbeth Davidson gave a charming account of Zeller's "Don't be cross" and a tender interpretation of that old favourite "Vilja", from Lehar's "The Merry Widow".

Earlier in the programme she was joined by baritone Jeremy Bristol for the duet "La ci darem la mano" from Mozart's "Don Giovanni", which they played for all the world.

Two former pupils of Woodbridge School, Drostan Hall and Malcolm Rycraft, left their places in the orchestra to give solo performances, on violin and French horn respectively. Drostan, now studying at the Royal Northern College of Music, played the "Meditation from Thais" by Massenet, showing a real understanding of the piece. Malcolm, soon to study at the Royal College of Music, gave a spirited performance of the Rondo from Mozart's "Horn Concerto No. 4".

The Grand March and Chorus from "Aida", by Verdi, was notable for a superb trumpet line and the Choral Dance from "Prince Igor", by Borodin, for some lovely work by flute and clarinet.

C.A.A.