

Philharmonic showcases elegance, precision of music

BY CHARLES WEBB

For The Republic

A full house at the magnificent First Christian Church greeted the performers in the Nov. 19 concert by the Columbus Indiana Philharmonic and Chorus together with the Anderson University Chorale. Of special interest were the world premiere of an orchestral-choral version of Daniel Forrest's "In Paradisum" and Alexandre Guilmant's "Symphony No. 1 in D Minor" for organ and orchestra featuring Daniel McKinley, organ soloist.

The concert opened with English composer William Walton's "Coronation Te Deum," written for the crowning of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. After a brief orchestral fanfare, the full-throated chorus sang the familiar opening words, "We Praise Thee, O God," with resonance and superb diction.

The balance between orchestra and chorus was excellent throughout, and the choir exhibited strong dynamic contrasts, alternating hushed pianissimos with soaring double fortes. The sound of the ensemble was aided immensely by the outstanding musical acoustics of the church sanctuary.

Maestro David Bowden had the large forces securely in his hand. The "Te Deum" calls for a brass ensemble playing from the balcony to provide the antiphonal effect Walton wanted. Crisp attacks, remarkable togetherness and stunning sounds were provided by the superior brass players. All of the forces acquitted themselves with grand effect in this noble piece reminding us of the great tradition of 20th-century English choral music.

Forrest spoke briefly before the performance of "In Paradisum." Instead of using the traditional liturgical text, Forrest chose a combination of biblical verses, as Brahms did in selecting a text for his famous "German Requiem." The opening words came from Psalms — "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Forrest writes in a completely tonal genre with long, legato melodic lines underscored by rich harmonies, often modulating to various keys. One is reminded of the choral-orchestral music of English composer, John Rutter, whom Forrest described as one of his musical influences.

The powerful climax utilizing the Luke text, "Verily I say that today thou shalt be in paradise with me," soared to the heavens, followed by the ending that retreated to a very soft, undulating sound from the mystical ringing of a bell choir from the balcony.

Forrest is a composer of substance, and this premiere brought enthusiastic responses from the large audience.

"Nanie" of Johannes Brahms opens with a beautiful orchestral pastorale, which showcased the outstanding woodwinds. The women of the choir, followed by tenors and basses, enter with fugal themes. A brief a cappella section highlighted the beauty of sound, balance and blend of the chorus, and intonation never wavered. Conductors Bowden and Richard Sowers, director of the Anderson chorus, trained their respective choruses meticulously, and even in the highest ranges there was no hint of strained voices.

Guilmant's "Organ Symphony" begins with thunderous organ chords, punctuated by full orchestral outbursts. Almost immediately the first theme is stated in the pedals of the organ, played with technical

precision and gusto by Daniel McKinley. Using the full resources of the 1942 Aeolian-Skinner pipe organ, McKinley demonstrated his introspection into this fine example of impressionistic composition and played with precision and strong rhythmic drive throughout.

The idyllic second movement brought out the beauty of various solo stops and both organ and orchestra captured the languid sicilienne style. Bringing the symphony to a brilliant close, the last movement opens with an organ flourish that McKinley executed at breathless speed. Fingers and feet were coordinated with the orchestra to produce exciting results.

The movement comes to a mighty close in D Major, even calling for the organist to play 3 notes at one time with two feet — not an easy task. Fortunately, that requirement doesn't happen very often. The organ and orchestra brought the movement to a rousing conclusion, and the audience jumped to its feet with a thunderous ovation.

The concert-goers on this memorable evening were treated to some of the most wonderful choral, orchestral and organ music ever composed.

That it was accomplished with such style, elegance, precision and inspiration is a tribute to the meticulous rehearsing that preceded Friday night's brilliant performance. Finally, we can all be grateful for the dedication, outstanding musicianship and determination of Bowden, who so skillfully led the large forces in a concert that will be long remembered.

Charles Webb is dean emeritus of Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.