

June 26th 1993.

NATIONAL MUSIC DAY

Conductor inspires his forces

NEWBURY CHORAL SOCIETY at St.Nicolas Church

LAST Saturday, the Newbury Choral Society presented an enterprising programme of English choral music from the earlier years of the 20th century, in association with the Newbury Symphonia, and conducted by Adrian Brown.

Sir Arthur Bliss' Pastoral is a fresh and vigorous celebration of the god Pan of Greek legend in all his aspects, as protector of shepherds and their flocks, master of woodnymphs and waternymphs and above all the god of love. The vocal writing is adventurous and taxing, spanning a wide range of dramatic and lyrical expression, and demanding rhythmical verve and exact intonation.

The choir, rather smaller than at their winter concerts but perhaps clearer sounding on that account, gave an attractive and convincing performance (though it was a tall order to expect them to portray languorous naiads luring fauns to subaqueous embraces) which owed, a good deal to the confident singing of the altos and tenors. Catherine Sams sang the 'Pigeon Song' delightfully, while Janet Way's flute kept us aware of the haunting and elusive presence of Pan himself.

In setting the Benedicite, Vaughan Williams faced a problem of avoiding monotony, since the text consists of numerous repetitions of the injunction "...bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him

for ever". As well as using melodic and rhythmic variety, he broke the work into contrasting sections; the fierce, almost barbaric rhythms of the opening were followed by gentler music where the choir was enhanced by Catherine Sams' contribution, and a quiet hymn was interpolated before the rousing finish. The choral writing was more straightforward than in the Bliss work and the choir sang with evident enjoyment.

Between these two performances, the Newbury Symphonia, which supported the choir very effectively, played a Movement for Strings by Malcolm Lipkin, who has associations with Newbury and was among the audience. In its form this work invites comparison with Elgar's masterpiece, the Introduction and Allegro. Unlike Elgar's instantly beguiling themes, those of Lipkin's work are spare and basic, but their development shows a similar combination of ingenuity and passion, producing a vigorous argument among the strings and building up to an exciting climax.

A stimulating and enjoyable occasion owed much to the work of the conductor, Adrian Brown; to draw again on Greek legend, he is a modern Prometheus, bringing heavenly fire to players and singers alike and inspiring them always to excel themselves.

JDB