

# Setting fair for prom

Newbury Choral Society, at Douai Abbey, on Saturday, July 3

## SUMMER PROMS

ONCE again Douai Abbey proved to be the perfect setting in sound terms for a concert of sacred music by Newbury Choral Society under their new conductor Leo Hussain.

The first part of the programme was devoted to three short pieces by Elgar, conducted with just the right degree of solemnity and vigour by Hussain.

*Give Unto the Lord* had a rich sweep of voices from the choir rising in exultation around the abbey.

The motet *Ave Verum* is a shorter, much more compact work on the crucifixion, sombre and moving.

The third and final piece *Spirit Of The Lord* began with glowing, celestial chords from the organ followed by the gradual swell of voices that filled the abbey with only a low bass throb in the background. But it is precisely at times like this that a full appreciation of the wonderful acoustics at Douai can be fully enjoyed, and appreciated.

Choir and conductor took a break next as Jonathan Cohen coaxed out a gloriously crisp and vibrant reading of Bach's *Suite No 5 for cello*. A rather personalised interpretation, it was nevertheless, very effective, the music once again benefiting from the abbey acoustics.



Finally, the *Requiem Op. 9* by French composer Maurice Durufle. The richness of detail in Durufle's scoring was brought out well by conductor Hussain in a work that is both moving but ultimately restrained by the composer. This powerful music was sung with firm authority by the choir who were in good voice throughout.

Baritone Edward Price had two short solo pieces where his voice was suitably deep and grave.

The power and beauty of soprano Frances Bourne was ably demonstrated in the *Pie Jesu* where her voice rang through the abbey radiantly in an even shorter solo part.

In total the mournful beauty of Durufle's *Requiem* was very well performed by choir, soloists and, in particular, organist Mark Williams who gave a sense of expansion and fullness to this work, written in both full orchestral and choir with soloists and organ versions.

Thanks to Williams (and the brief addition of Cohen's cello) the full splendour of this music was captured and a large orchestra never missed.

DEREK ANSELL