

Philharmonic warms to new venue

Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra

Sutton Coldfield Town Hall

★★★★

In all its proud 78-year history, Sutton Coldfield Philharmonic Society can rarely have promoted a concert as exciting as that given by the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra on Sunday.

Though we tend to connect the BPO with its home base in Birmingham's Adrian Boult Hall, this tireless band in fact does a good deal of travelling, bringing to many parts of the region music-making of a quality which is the equal of many full-time professional groups.

Yet during the first item in Sunday's all-Rachmaninov programme I seriously wondered if I was hearing the same BPO I have admired for many years.

This *Vocalise* sounded scrawny, under-nourished and ill-defined, when conductor Michael Lloyd invariably draws much better results from

his players than this.

Perhaps the dry, unforgiving acoustic of this otherwise very comfortable auditorium was bedevilling everyone's ears, but with the unique sound-world of the magnificent *Third Piano Concerto*, faith in these forces was restored, Lloyd securing a well-balanced collaboration, individual contributions positively characterised, with soloist Piers Lane.

Lane's unflashy, consummate pianism, as patrician in delivery as the composer himself, drew extended melodic lines over the masses of teeming detail decorating the textures, shaping and pointing together with the attentive

Lloyd *Rubato* alive with personality.

After this epic, Lane's chaste little Gluck/Sgambati *Melodie* was the perfect encore, but it was a pity the piano remained onstage after the interval, forcing some of the players into the anonymity of the wings for the second half's powerful, persuasive reading of the originally ill-fated *First Symphony* (Glazunov's drunken conducting wrecked the premiere).

Particular praise to the biting lower strings and the warm, super-reliable horns, but plaudits all round for this highly-moving experience.

Christopher Morley



Conductor Michael Lloyd and the Birmingham Philharmonic