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SUCCESS favours the bold, we are told, and the boldness, verging on rashness, of the decision to perform Havergal Brian's immense "Gothic Symphony" in Hanley was rewarded with a striking measure of success.

The performance, in the Victoria Hall last night, by massed instrumental and choral forces of some 400 performers was a remarkable demonstration of the power and originality of Havergal Brian's music and of his mastery of the symphonic medium. It was also impressive testimony to the enthusiasm and musical accomplishment of the predominantly amateur performance, directed by Trevor Stokes.

In this, the first provincial performance of the work and the first occasion in which all the instrumental resources demanded by the composer were deployed, belated tribute was paid to Brian in his native city, not least in the enthusiasm of the packed audience.

It was not to be expected, given the difficulties of the music and conditions of performance, that an ideal finish in precision or balance, or quality or refinement of tone could be achieved.

What was important and so gratifying was the way in which the broad effect and essential spirit of the music was achieved in playing and singing, lively and committed, of notable quality. The performance seemed most successful in the purely orchestral movements, where the composer seems most assured with often striking themes and telling instrumental colours.

The huge and sprawling Te Deum with its contrasts of texture and dynamics, vocal and instrumental, was impressively realised in this performance.

Trevor Stokes, as conductor, had the measure of the music and controlled his forces skilfully.

The capable quartet of soloists, Marjorie Tadley, soprano; Jean Heavley, contralto; Eric Baskyfield, tenor; and Philip Ravenscroft, bass; sang commendably in their often unrewarding roles.

The performance was at once an "occasion" and a notable achievement for both organisers and performers. It was heralded by Bantock's overblown arrangement of the National Anthem. J.O.

Concerts Daily  
Telegraph  
22.5.78

Victoria Hall, Hanley

# Stoke Gothic Symphony Orchestra

By PAUL DEWHIRST

AS we know from performances of Havergal Brian's later orchestral works on Radio 3, his massive "Gothic" Symphony, written between 1919 and 1927, is in many ways an atypical piece.

Nevertheless, it remains his most celebrated composition, and last night's performance in the Victoria Hall, Hanley, given by the Stoke Gothic Symphony Orchestra, the Gothic Chorus, a children's chorus, some 700 (mostly amateur) musicians in all, and conducted by Trevor Stokes, was the first to provide all the forces asked for by the composer. The two previous complete performances economised on the brass bands.

The first three purely orchestral movements that comprise part one — a modified sonata allegro, slow movement and scherzo — last for about 38 minutes. In them, one senses sporadically, an apocalyptic vision of some power, but it is surely imperfectly realised. What melodic invention there is is either weak or, as is the case with the almost post-tonal second subject of the first movement, incongruous into the bargain. The orchestration, too, is often turgid and monotonous.

The second part, a 70-minute setting of the Te Deum, is much more striking, over-extended, perhaps, and eclectic in inspiration, but containing choral writing as original in its way as that of Charles Ives. The orchestra is also used much more imaginatively.

Considering the enormous difficulties, the orchestral playing was very creditable. So, too, with the exception of the children's chorus, was the singing. But the hero of the performance was clearly the conductor, Trevor Stokes, whose conviction of the work's greatness was vividly communicated.

## Gothic pilgrim

FELIX APRA

IT SEEMED wholly appropriate to the scale of the symphony Brian Rayner Cook and I motored to the Potteries to hear last Sunday that we should boil up on the way there and blow out at 70 mph on the way back, for Havergal Brian's "Gothic" is nothing if not overheated, over-blown, monumental and more than life-size.

Yet our pilgrimage to the Victoria Hall, Hanley, was rewarding, for a spirit of enthusiasm for the neglected local lad (whom both of us had known) animated the vast choral and orchestral apparatus of 800 performers (all listed in the printed programme), produced by Paul Shaw and conducted by Trevor Stokes with obviously pondered efficiency. The purely orchestral first part showed a continuity and interest not always maintained in the more ambitious second part consisting of a setting of the Te Deum, in which the contrapuntal intricacy of the choral writing is more speculative than effective. And the steadily rising temperature in the hall proved an impediment to just intonation.

This first performance using the full forces envisaged by the composer confirmed the impression left by the two earlier airings that, fundamentally, though The Gothic Symphony is, it has as much intransigent cerebration as a serial work. That is where its languors lie. But perhaps a fourth hearing may reduce them.

Sunday Times  
28.5.78

Evening Standard  
20.5.78

## In symphony

Some say it will be the concert of the decade. Others hail it as one of the most memorable events in Staffordshire's musical history.

Whatever one's feelings about Havergal Brian's Gothic Symphony, the facts are that this mammoth undertaking has enjoyed a massive response, and the performance in the Victoria Hall, Hanley, must prove to be a special experience.

It has caught the imagination, and even those who felt the undertaking a little ambitious must be pleasantly surprised at the success of planning which is essential in presenting such a complex symphony.

If enthusiasm is the key, however then the evening, with a host of singers and nearly 200 musicians, will be a roaring success.

In any event, it will be a marvellous home-town tribute to Havergal Brian, who died only a few years ago. It is a pity that his unique contribution to the world of music is only now being fully recognised.

## MUSIC

The "Gothic" (Victoria Hall, Hanley). Mammoth musical event as 800 performers take part in the first complete performance outside London.

Havergal Brian's Gothic Symphony. Next Saturday — but already a sell-out.



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This first performance using the full forces envisaged by the composer confirmed the impression left by the two earlier airings that, fundamentally tonal though The Gothic Symphony is, it has as much intransigent cerebration as a serial work. That is where its langueurs lie. But perhaps a fourth hearing may reduce them.

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Sunday Times  
28.5.78

## Concerts *Daily Telegraph* 22.5.78 Victoria Hall, Hanley Stoke Gothic Symphony Orchestra

By PAUL DEWHIRST

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The first three purely orchestral movements that comprise part one—a modified sonata-allegro, slow movement and scherzo—last for about 55 minutes. In them, one senses spasmodically, an apocalyptic vision of some power, but it is surely imperfectly realised. What melodic invention there is is either weak or, as is the case with the almost pentatonic second subject of the first movement, incongruous into the bargain. The orchestration, too, is often turgid and monotonous.

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Sentinel  
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