

Poor tonal balance by singers and orchestra

By W. L. Hoffmann



Vaughan Williams: Hodie (A Cantata for Christmas) The Llewellyn Choir with the Canberra Community Orchestra. Llewellyn Hall, December 6.

THIS delightful Yuletide cantata is tinged with an English flavour, being essentially settings of seasonal verses by poets such as Milton, Coverdale, Herbert and Hardy mixed with early English carols, all enhanced and coloured by the "pastoral" quality of Vaughan Williams's music.

Unfortunately, Saturday night's performance, conducted by Richard McIntyre, rarely captured the inner qualities of the music, principally because of the poor tonal balance between singers and orchestra which persisted throughout.

It started disappointingly, with the joyous choral prologue *Nowell!* which introduces the work in an exultant mood being sung so tentatively and with so little vocal projection from the choristers that they were almost completely swamped by the orchestral texture.

This lack of vocal strength continued for most of the performance, and thus the text being sung by both the choir and the three soloists was

rarely discernible. This was compounded by the annoying habit of the auditorium lights being extinguished throughout the performance, something which has consistently happened recently at choral performances in the hall.

What is the sense in printing in the purchased program the words being sung, then plunging the audience into darkness and making it impossible to follow the performance from that program?

It was only the narrations linking the various sections, and pleasingly sung with a strong, fine tonal quality and excellent diction by soprano Amy Myers, in which the words could be followed with ease.

The orchestral playing, despite some intonational problems in the strings, provided a commendable realisation of much of the beauty of the composer's scoring. The players could not be blamed for the poor balance with the singers. The most rewarding musical moments were conducted by Philip Hartstein, an attractive performance of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* with dance *divertissement* by the Canberra Dance Theatre.