



MUSIC

The spirit of a choral Christmas

By W.L. HOFFMANN

Bach: The Christmas Oratorio. The Llewellyn Choir & Canberra Chamber Orchestra conducted by Richard McIntyre. Llewellyn Hall. December 7.

IT WAS a rare opportunity to hear a complete performance of Bach's Christmas Oratorio when the six cantatas of which it consists were sung at two concerts in Llewellyn Hall last Saturday afternoon and evening.

Unfortunately, I was not able to hear the first part, but the excellent presentation of the final three cantatas at the evening concert suggested that the first half must have been just as rewarding.

While those first three cantatas deal with the story of the Nativity, the fourth is for New Year's Day and the festival of the naming of Jesus, and the evening concert started with a confident realisation from the choir of its jubilant opening chorus *Come and thank Him, come and praise Him*.

The quality of the choral singing was immediately bright and eager, with the conductor maintaining brisk but realistic tempi which emphasised the joyousness which is the underlying spirit of this great work.

This spirit was further captured by the freshness of the excellent young voices of the five soloists. Tenor Carl Cooper was a fine Evangelist, confidently carrying the narrative, while soprano Sarah Shalders provided beautifully expressive singing in her solos *Ah! My Saviour, I entreat you* in the fourth cantata and the triumphant aria *Nought against the power He wieldeth* in the final cantata for the feast of the Epiphany.