

Assured delivery fulfilling

Music

By **W. L. Hoffmann**

Rachmaninov — Vespers. Llewellyn Choir. St Christopher's Cathedral. July 27.

RACHMANINOV'S *All-Night Vigil*, or *Vespers*, as it is also known, consists of 15 unaccompanied motets in which the composer blends, with considerable skill and often dramatic effect, the choral tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church with non-liturgical folk music elements.

It makes strongly expressive and distinctive rhythmic demands on the singers, so it was probably wise to have the short break in the performance after the ninth vesper, *Blagosloven est, Gospodi (The Story of the Resurrection)*, as a respite for both singers and audience. This, the longest vesper, and the most concentrated in expression, is the central point of the *Vespers*, and an assuredly projected realisation is essential if the work, *in toto*, is to achieve a satisfying effect. Conductor Richard McIntyre was able to draw from his singers that assured performance.

The singing in the motets leading to it, and in those following, was also nicely controlled so the total effect of the performance was a gradual rising to a central dramatic climax, followed by a gentle descent to a satisfying feeling of fulfilment in the final hymn to the Virgin, *Vzbrannoy voevode*.

The choir necessarily carries the main burden of the motets, with the two soloists, alto and tenor, used in less than a third of the work. In this performance these solos were pleasingly sung by Miriam Miley-Read and Patrick Oxley.

The warm acoustic of the church provides a most suitable ambience for music of this nature, and the performance deservedly drew a respectfully enthusiastic response from the audience which almost filled the cathedral.

This all-Rachmaninov program was opened by pianist Anthony Smith playing a bracket of four pieces for piano solo by the composer — three of his *Preludes* and one of the *Etudes-Tableaux*. And even though the challenging *Etude-Tableau in C minor, Op 39, No 7*, had some small problems and was not played with the confidence of the preludes, together they made a generally attractive start to the concert.