

LET'S HOPE THIS WILL BECOME A PERMANENT

ASSOCIATION

FIRST fruit of what some of us hope may become a permanent association between the Stevenage Symphony Orchestra and the town's Choral Society, under the aegis of the Stevenage Music Society, was a fine virile performance of Kodaly's "Psalmus Hungaricus" in St. George's Church on Saturday night.

Peter Wigfield conducted, and the soloist was Adrian de Peyer, a tenor who seemed to have the measure of the composer's style and feeling.

The work itself will surely rank as the peak of Kodaly's choral music, though probably with the Te Deum of Budavar and the Missa Brevis as close runners-up.

It is a protest against betrayal, national and personal, and all that his native Hungary has suffered under successive enemy

occupations. The words by poet and preacher Michael Veg, written during the Turkish occupation, are freely adapted from the fifty-fifth psalm, and in setting them Kodaly matched the psalmist's own fire of denunciation and demand for heavenly judgment.

To these fires and petitions the singers and the orchestra, and Mr. Wigfield's conducting, brought tremendous zest — but with due regard for the quieter lamentations.

BETRAYAL

For those who have delved into Kodaly's life as well as his music, a particularly poignant part of the Psalmus must be the composer's recalling, via King

David and Veg, of his own betrayal by a fellow professor at the Academy, whom he had regarded as his best friend.

Apparently Kodaly was accused of breaching Academy regulations by giving additional tuition to students in their own homes, and he had to appear before a commission which eventually found in his favour. But his friend's false witness against him rankled.

All this finds expression in the chorus beginning "When as King David was sore afflicted, by those he trusted . . ." and in the subsequent tenor solo starting "I could have borne so sore an affliction, were it an enemy . . ." reaching its crux at "Thou art the man whose hand would have struck me down!"

Mr. de Peyer excelled here and in his call, two bars later "Smite them with destruction!"

Chorus and orchestra were splendidly responsive here and elsewhere, the former especially in the singing of the wordless passages, and the latter at very many points of the score, both sectionally and in the climactic tuttis.

RESTRAINT

With little space left I can only skim the surface of the other works that were sung and played. They were the Schubert "Unfinished" symphony, which opened the programme with a first movement that was too loud for my comfort (I was in the back row of a full church) and a second that did not touch the ultimate of Schubert's gentle lyricism, the Faure Requiem, and Handel's thrilling "Zadok the Priest."

The Faure was sung and accompanied with respect for its musical restraint, with Robert Davidson admirable in the baritone solos, and Diane Munson bringing me, not for the first time, near to tears with her lovely singing of the "Pie Jesu."

Margaret Nunn, at the organ, worked wonders with a not entirely adequate instrument. Of the Handel no more needs saying beyond that it was "given the full works" by everybody concerned and sent most of us, I imagine, homeward bound with its glorious sound still resounding in our ears. HFA