

Music

English Music Festival Dorchester Abbey

A music festival devoted entirely to English composers is a welcome addition to the cultural calendar, and Em Marshall's four-year dream finally came to fruition last Friday with a thrilling and inspirational concert by the BBC Concert Orchestra. Appropriately, the evening started with a fanfare — heralding not just that evening's entertainment, but hopefully the genesis of a festival that will continue for many years to come.

Conductor David Lloyd-Jones seemed in buoyant mood, ensuring an exhilarating account of Holst's sublime *Walt Whitman Overture*, followed by a nicely effected change of mood with Vaughan Williams's evocative *Norfolk Rhapsody No.1*. There were some fine solo moments here for clarinet and viola, both capturing that central, haunting melody to perfection.

There was a brief moment of hilarity just before Frank



Bridge's *Oration*, when proceedings were held up while waiting for a rather noisy aeroplane to pass overhead. "It's all right," said Lloyd-Jones, turning to the audience, "it's one of ours!"

The allusion was appropriate, as Bridge's powerful, single-movement concerto is an outcry against the futility of war. All his anguish and despair are encapsulated in this dramatic, restless and impassioned piece, with its vivid images of suffering and death. Much of the outpouring of grief comes from the cello soloist, giving guest star Julian Lloyd-Webber the opportunity to demonstrate his considerable virtuosity and technical mastery. A further opportunity presented

itself after the interval with Holst's *Invocation*, a piece that foreshadows his most famous work, *The Planets*.

Finally, there was a rare performance of Sullivan's *Irish Symphony*. A pedant might question the inclusion of an Irish symphony, written by a composer with strong Irish ancestry, in an English Music Festival. But Sullivan's musical roots are firmly in English soil, and this performance was a timely reminder that his instinctive melodic gifts extended well beyond the boundaries of comic opera. This thrilling performance brought the festival's opening concert to a suitably magnificent finale. Wonderful.

Nicola Lisle

OXFORD TIMES: Friday 27 Oct. 2006