

choir's orff triumph

THERE have long been arguments about the suitability of **Carl Orff's** spectacular *Carmina Burana* for performances in churches.

But those aside, **St Albans Bach Choir's** performance of the work in **St Albans Abbey** on Saturday must rate as a triumph for all concerned.

And there can be little doubt that the glorious acoustic quality of the Abbey added greatly to the overall effect of the performance.

Choir conductor **Andrew Lucas** has a knack of getting the very best out of any choir he works with and over the 10 years he has been in charge of the Bach Choir he has built it into one equal in ability to many of the best in the country.

And for Saturday's performance his great ability as a trainer and conductor really shone through as the choir, augmented by the boys of the **Cathedral Choir** and the **Abbey Girls Choir**, apparently

romped with ease through every sudden change in tempo or key in this daunting work.

Pianists **Tom Winpenny** and **Andrew Woodrow**, together with the brass and percussion of **Sinfonia Verdi**, provided a dazzling performance of Orff's instrumental music which is so important to the success of the work.

Just to complete this remarkable performance, soloists soprano **Leslie-Jane Rogers**, tenor **Sean Clayton**, and bass **Stephen Roberts**, each gave of their best.

In particular Sean Clayton impressed in the plaintive song *Olim Lacus Colueram* and Stephen Roberts gave delightful performances in his several solo spots.

The impressive evening had started with performances of **Sir Michael Tippett's** *Five Negro Spirituals* and **Sir John Tavener's** *A Hymn to the Mother of God* and

Song for Athene, all three of which are unaccompanied.

Although the composers have completely contrasting styles, the two works were excellent partners in the exciting programme.

The spirituals are packed with complex changes in dynamics which the choir and soloists handled with consummate ease, as they did with the difficult sound patterns in the second two pieces which Tavener drew from the music of the Orthodox Church.

In particular the deep droning bass line in *Song for Athene* was exceptional.

For all concerned this was an outstanding evening of music and one can only wonder how Andrew Lucas and the choir can continue to improve and excite. The next major concert, Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, at the end of March is something to be anticipated.

JOHN MANNING