

BRIAN DOCKRAY reviews 'Classical Jewels' presented by Catelli Trinidad All Stars

I BELIEVE that someone has described the "Classical Jewels" concert by the Catelli All Stars as a "major breakthrough in Steelband music", or words to that effect. This is very enthusiastic, very inaccurate, and — historically — completely wrong.

The writer has probably never heard any of the Steelband Festivals; perhaps he is too young to remember the Festival of 1965, when the Test piece was the first item played by All Stars at their Concert.

Apart from this test piece, each band had also to play an item of own choice, also "classical." I would call that Festival "a major breakthrough": in comparison the recent concert was merely an extension of the work already begun.

Most of the music I heard on Friday night I have heard already from the All Stars. The only additions to the repertoire were the accompaniments to the two soloists and the choir, and the 1812 Overture of Tchaikovsky.

The pre-concert publicity given to this last work proves one thing at any rate—advertising does work with some people!

A GREAT WORRY

Tchaikovsky himself said of this composition: "written in a great hurry . . . very noisy . . . written without much enthusiasm . . . and probably of no great artistic value."

It was faithfully transcribed and arranged for Steel band, but the sound was very muddy in places, and several climaxes were lost.

The roar of the cannons was most unconvincing (was it a thunder sheet?), although better than a performance I heard by the Police Band many years ago, when rifles and revolvers fired blank shots (I hope) behind the stage!

And yet the audience gave an almost standing ovation (another very dubious American import), which goes to show the power of suggestion, if the advertising is strong enough.

I can now actually be-



TENOR PAT FLORES SINGS

An enjoyable concert but no 'breakthrough'...

lieve that there are people who will buy certain products because they have seen the television advertisements.

Like the woman with her head perpetually on one side, described by a respected critic as "having a love affair with her horse". And that is one of the better ones!

But back to the concert. The two guest singers performed extremely well. Mr. Flores' singing of Verdi's "Celeste Aida" was particularly effective. It is normal concert procedure, with a conventional Symphony Orchestra, that the singer does not use a microphone.

Had the rehearsal time been longer, and the pans trained to hold strain, Mr. Flores' voice would have appeared to even greater advantage without amplification, which — no matter how good, and Friday night's was not that good — always tends to distort tone.

Mr. Oxley's little known Meyerbeer aria was very effective, suiting his particular timbre. Again, unfortunately, amplified, with the usual distortions.

The San Fernando Chorale has long been a choral body I have admired. Their chorus from Haydn's "Creation" came as a disappointment, how-

ever. The pace was slow, the accompaniment was too loud; therefore the choir sang consistently sharp, the tone became hard, and because of inaccuracies in the pan basses, the harmony was confused to say the least.

As to harmony; again a valid criticism must be made about the use of orchestral tympani, as exemplified by the All Stars

version of the Barber of Seville Overture.

These instruments make a musical sound—they are tuned to given notes—and so to use them merely to reinforce a climax is a musical error, in that the note that was being used on Friday was merely confusing Rossini's harmony, as it bore no relation to the chords being played by the rest of the pans.

Surely a Bass Drum, which has a neutral sound, would have been preferable.

Going back to the San Fernando Chorale, their second contribution, "In Praise of Laughter" by Handel, was aural relief; it was well performed but naturally lacked the effectiveness the accompaniment would have given.

A few last words: my compliments to the Stage Manager, to the Front of House managers for their control of late comers and the warning notices at the head of the stairs (but empty bottles still found their way into the Hall); but my scolding to the proof reader of the programme.

Two items were dated "first of November" (1st Nov.) instead of "1st Movt." A new tempo indication was invented — "Allegro" instead of "Allegro"; and Meyerbeer would not have liked to see his name mis-spelled.

To sum up: this was quite an enjoyable concert, fairly competently performed, but nothing really outstanding, and certainly no "breakthrough."