

Ensemble does not disappoint

THE ISCA ensemble, under musical director Roger Hendy, has earned its reputation for exciting concerts in the Parish Church in Sidmouth.

Saturday evening (March 2) was another such to present a broad range of music to its audience and generate income for local charitable causes, writes *Stephen Huyshe-Shires*.

This time the beneficiary was the local community programme of Sidmouth Rotary Club.

Those who attended were the direct beneficiaries of another amazing evening's music making from the ensemble, who opened with the rich sonorities of Beethoven's overture for Goethe's play *Egmont*. The orchestra confidently carried the piece from its slow beginnings to its ebullient and triumphal end. Dvorak's three Slavonic Dances followed. A Starodavny, an elegant and gracious polonaise came first. The second, titled Skocna, was lively enough to enable an English morris side to leap about to its energetic metre. The Furiant, the final dance, was used by Dvorak a number of times and this well known one was enthusiastically delivered by the orchestra.

American composer Eric Ewazen is probably as unfamiliar to the Sidmouth

audience as was the solo instrument for his concerto which closed the first half.

The large marimba, a type of xylophone, attracted a gathering of interested spectators as soloist Edward Scull explained its workings afterwards. What they had heard was a very engaging three movement piece which belied the complexity of its execution.

The marimba opened the work with dark pulsing chords which gave a basis to the whole structure. The lyrical and melodic first movement passed into a gentle second which could have been the backdrop to a film showing wide open country spaces. The third sounded as though it might break into a dance sequence worthy of Bernstein before it reached its climax through a glorious crescendo.

If all that were not enough excitement, the ISCA's finished the concert with more Beethoven; the relentless driving rhythms of symphony no 7, enough for Weber to comment that Beethoven was "ripe for the madhouse".

The rhythmic tension was evident from the very beginning as the players pressed frenziedly onwards to the incomparable climax of the two triple forte blasts at its glorious end.