

Concert BSO/Alsop

Lighthouse, Poole

★★★★☆

GEOFF BROWN

Everyone else at Waterloo station on Saturday seemed bound for Twickenham or football, but my rallying cry was "Westward Ho!" and the second instalment of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's welcome splurge devoted to new music from the South and South West of England.

It was odd to find that catchment area catching Sir John Tavener, a composer who, in his works at least, appears to live on his own planet. A planet where you never fret over time; where variety of sound and experience is not valued; where you compose *The Protecting Veil*.

The most rewarding element in Marin Alsop's revival of the Proms sensation of 1989 was the playing — and the 17th-century cello — of the soloist Maria Kliegel.

Stradivarius, the instrument's maker, might not have recognised the 40-plus aching minutes of throbbing sighs as music; but he should have appreciated the instrument's superb chestnut warmth and Kliegel's ability to find nuances of colour and expression in the slow drip of bare, unrewarding notes. Composed as an Orthodox musical icon of the Mother of God, this is a piece that wears well only if the listener has lost consciousness.

On the surface few notes were naked in the concert's world premiere, *Secret Destinations*, the third BSO commission from Stephen McNeff, the orchestra's "composer-in-the-house". Textures kept changing every few bars, motifs tied themselves in strenuous knots: all in salute to the questing spirit of the late poet Charles Causley, a friend and mentor of the composer. I wish the humane impulse behind the 14-minute work had resulted

in better music, but at first hearing this seemed an ungainly, overworked piece, without natural beauty.

Alsop and the BSO bucketed through regardless. They needed even more grit for Jonathan Lloyd's *Symphony No 4*, a Proms commission of 1988, resurrected for only its second public performance by the Encore scheme run by BBC Radio 3 and the Royal Philharmonic Society. Yet their sweat and polish was definitely worthwhile: Lloyd's quizzical imagination is unique among contemporary British composers.

The work's core material seems dangerously restrictive, just the notes of a rising scale. But Lloyd performs so many cartwheels with big-band lurches, folk-music scratchings, mandolin, guitar, and lion's roar that you soon become sucked in. Here is symphonic form reconfigured as a fun house, with tonality viewed through a crazy mirror. Original, refreshing, music at last that didn't limp.