

Different piece of Puccini...

PUCCHINI is much in vogue these days, as Pavarotti warbles away to introduce BBC World Cup television from Italy.

Sales of his records are rocketing, and — who knows? — it might be that opera, and classical music in general, will gain a few enthusiasts as a result of the fat man's golden voice.

Exception

But there's a lot more to Puccini than a bleeding chunk of "Turandot." Almost all of it was written for the stage, of course, though there is one rarely-heard, and very beautiful, exception — the "Messa di Gloria", composed in 1880 when Puccini was 21.

Nantwich Choral Society is to sing this, together with Poulenc's "Gloria," at St Mary's parish church tomorrow night (7.30): a fascinating combination of musical styles that promises a concert of rich enjoyment.

No excuse for non-attendance will be accepted; Nantwich Choral Society v Puccini is unlikely to be as one-sided as Italy v Ireland, and England don't play Cameroon until Sunday. Puccini came from a long line of religious musicians, and at the age



● Nantwich Parish Church . . . concert venue

of 14 he was playing the organ at churches all over the place. When he was 17, though, he saw a performance of "Aida" at Pisa, and his mind was made up: he wanted to compose opera.

But first he had to graduate from the Institute of Lucca so that he could study at Milan Conservatory, then as now the centre of Italian opera. And as part of his final exams at the Institute he composed the "Messa di Gloria".

It is, therefore, a seminal work, and Puccini was justifiably proud of it. Verdi's influence glows everywhere, but the intensity of religious emotion is never in doubt.

Though "Messa di Gloria" was performed only once in Puccini's lifetime, some of its music can be directly heard in "Manon

Lescaut" and "Edgar", and both "Tosca" and "Suor Angelica" borrow from it stylistically.

Poulenc's magnificent "Gloria", popularised by Bernstein, needs no introduction. Alternating between the lyrical and the mystical, it is the sort of music in which Nantwich Choral Society has proved itself particularly adept.

Soloists at tomorrow's concert will be Catrin Ley (soprano), Jeffrey Cresswell (tenor) and Philip Ravenscroft (bass). Stephen Buckman conducts, with Simon Dixon accompanying at the organ.

AFTER the performance of Beethoven's monumental "Missa Solemnis" at Lichfield Cathedral a fortnight ago, Ex Cathedral Chamber Choir shifts the mood in the Long Gallery at Sudbury Hall, near Uttoxeter, tomorrow (7.30pm), with music from the time of King Charles II.

The programme includes extracts from Monteverdi, madrigals, Italian love duets and the opera "Venus and Adonis" by the King's court composer, John Blow.

The choir will be accompanied by violins, viola, cello, harpsichord and recorder.

Gorgeous but needs discipline

PUCCHINI couldn't have written a bad tune to save his life, but the trouble with unchained melody is that it quickly gets out of hand.

And that is exactly what happened when Nantwich Choral Society performed the "Messa di Gloria" at St Mary's parish church on Saturday night.

Uncomfortable

Some of the choristers simply didn't follow the conductor, Stephen Buckman; there were too many false entrances for comfort, and the Gloria, in

particular, lacked discipline.

Which was a pity, because tenor Jeffrey Cresswell and bass Philip Ravenscroft sang the solo parts with a harmonious dignity that was heard at its best in their duet.

Mysticism

Poulenc's "Gloria" was done much more carefully, with due regard to the composer's intentions. Catrin Ley occasionally struggled with the soaring soprano role, but the work's lyrical mysticism was fairly caught.

Simon Dixon played the organ very well indeed.

Evening Sentinel

Evening Sentinel Fri 24th June 1990