

The Lammermuir Festival

Various venues, East Lothian

They'd been wanting to stage it for years, admitted the Lammermuir Festival's co-artistic directors Hugh MacDonald and James Waters. But Britten's **Noye's Fludde** (★★★★★) is a huge undertaking, a family opera on the story of Noah's Ark that brings together professionals and amateurs, kids and adults, both as singers and as musicians. This year's festival production required months of coaching and learning from the performers, some of whom had never even set foot on a stage before, as well as a huge team of teachers, musicians, directors, chaperones and more, to ensure the whole thing came together.

It's Lammermuir's seventh festival this year, with a bigger and more ambitious programme than ever before – and Britten's warm-hearted monster of a masterpiece fitted beautifully in among the festival's bold offerings, in two afternoon performances that seemed to fill every nook of Dunbar Parish Church on the opening weekend.

And with its recorder choir, campanologists, and youngsters on percussion, brass and singing on stage, it felt like the whole of the East Lothian town had got involved.

In terms of celebrating the talents of the community, and all the benefits that brings, it was an astonishing achievement.

But crucially, Lammermuir's *Noye's Fludde* worked brilliantly on its own terms as a piece of musical theatre – down in large part to the slick, inventive direction from Caitlin Skinner, as well as the enthusiastic, energetic conducting of Sian Edwards, in front of a gargantuan ensemble that filled one side of the Church's cavernous space, based around professional players from Music Co-OPER-ative Scotland.

Andrew McTaggart gave a vivid, demonstrative performance as Noah, with Scottish Opera stalwart Donald Maxwell suitably stentorian as the Voice of God.

But it was the kids that carried the show – dancing and running through the audience, teeming on stage carrying cuddly toys as the animals went in two by two, and



↑ Ilan Volkov led the BBC SSO with style and vigour



← Andrew McTaggart made a powerful Noah

providing brilliantly believable performances in lead roles, especially the very fine septet of youngsters singing and acting Noah's sons and daughters, and youngsters Maia Baptie and Natalie Wilson, who danced the raven and dove with impeccable charm.

Britten's music has lost none of its power and freshness even nearly six decades after the work was written, and by the time chorus master Moira Morrison had raised the audience to its feet for his final communal hymn – yes, even the audience gets in on the act

– there can have been barely a dry eye in the house.

A few days later, it was back to St Mary's Parish Church, Haddington, for the **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra** under Ilan Volkov (★★★★★) who were joined by Dutch violinist Liza Ferschtman for what felt like a fascinatingly analytical Beethoven Violin Concerto. It might have been because of St Mary's generous acoustics, but Volkov took things at a surprisingly careful, deliberate pace throughout, which, combined with Ferschtman's vivid, strongly projected playing, made it feel like every turn of phrase was being picked over for meaning.

Volkov closed with a restless Brahms Third Symphony that captured the work's joyful turbulence magnificently – although the skittering detail of his likeable contemporary addition, Rolf Riehm's witty *He, très douz roussignol joly*, was quite simply lost amid the Church's rich resonance.

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