

**Tasmin Little (violin) Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vasily Petrenko**

ROYAL ALBERT HALL 23 AUGUST 2012

Tasmin Little has made a speciality of Delius, as her recordings of the Violin Concerto, which she played in this Prom, the Double Concerto and the violin sonatas might suggest. It is music that can do with a little help, as the composer himself is too often dismissed as slight and indulgent, a sensualist with scant grasp of larger forms. Should you agree, and be in the same room as Tasmin Little, don't say so out loud. In this concert she was as persuasive as ever. She performed the opening section with an easy fluency and a sense of both conversational exposition and firm musical direction. Although occasionally overwhelmed by the brass, her playing had clarity and beautiful articulation. It also had a sense of something intimate and personal: Little showed an ability to fill this large hall with what seemed like private musical thoughts.

Later she gave an eloquent, understated *moto perpetuo* commentary over stately dances in the orchestra, before finally dying away, *primus inter pares* among the wind solos with which the work winds down.

Brass peccadillos aside, she was ably abetted by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Vasily Petrenko, in a performance that should have convinced some of those listening to seek it out again.

TIM HOMFRAY

**Frank Peter Zimmermann (violin) Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra/ Daniele Gatti**

ROYAL ALBERT HALL 26 AUGUST 2012

The challenges of Berg's Violin Concerto do not diminish with familiarity. Technically it isn't going to get any easier of course, but equally daunting are its complex emotional layers, its diffuse narrative, its dramatic breadth. But at this concert Frank Peter Zimmermann had its measure. Paradoxically, his playing was in many ways straightforward. There was a winning simplicity to much of the first movement, fundamentally lyrical, with the heart-stopping folk melody its summation. His control was absolute, his shining, beguiling tone moulding phrases with ineffable sensitivity. His lyricism spanned the second movement like silk, the brute force of its hammered rhythms countered by transcendent beauty. The final pages, weaving around Bach's

chorale 'Es ist genug', were sublime, time-stopping, magical. Daniele Gatti and the remarkable Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra matched him throughout in empathetic partnership and subtle colouration.

As an encore Zimmermann played more Bach, the Andante from his A minor Solo Sonata BWV1003. This was delicate, simple and understated, and it summed up all his playing: internalised, undemonstrative, masterly in its musical communication, and utterly spellbinding.

TIM HOMFRAY

**Nikolaj Znaider (violin) Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra/Riccardo Chailly**

ROYAL ALBERT HALL

1 SEPTEMBER 2012

In this Prom, a Danish violinist played Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto (in E minor by the way; if the earlier D minor ever catches on perhaps we'll have to start referring to this one as his Second Violin Concerto). In normal circumstances this would be no cause for comment, but here he was like a guest at a family gathering, playing with Mendelssohn's own orchestra, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, in an all-Mendelssohn concert.



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**Nikolaj Znaider: a bold performance of Mendelssohn**

Together they produced a rich, bold performance, crisply played and full of colour and energy. The first movement fairly galloped forward at times, the pace tempered by Znaider's lyrical, singing melodic style. His tone in the Andante was intense, warm and sweet, the Romantic sentiment it embodied reinforced by judicious portamentos.

The finale, like the opening Allegro, swept forwards, with Znaider light and effervescent, sparkling with glee, effortless and mischievous as the Leipzig Gewandhaus and Riccardo Chailly danced around him.

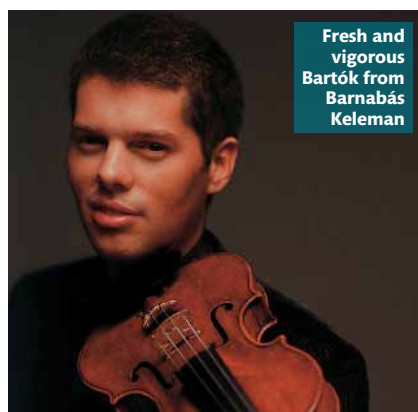
For an encore, Znaider barked 'Bach', and performed the Gavotte en rondeau from the Third Partita BWV1006. It was bright and vigorous, with touches of rubato and dynamic colour, every note beautifully placed.

TIM HOMFRAY

**EDINBURGH**

**David Kettle reports from the Scottish capital's International Festival and Fringe**

It was a strong string year in Edinburgh, with several high-profile violin soloists in the International Festival's Usher Hall orchestral concerts, as well as a number of impressive string groups in the Queen's Hall chamber recitals. Scottish favourite **Nicola Benedetti** and Greek-born violinist **Leonidas Kavakos** both gave compelling Szymanowski concerto performances as part of a four-concert cycle from Valery Gergiev and the London Symphony Orchestra. But sadly we'll never know how gypsy-influenced



**Fresh and vigorous Bartók from Barnabás Keleman**

fiddler József Lendvay would have sounded in the Bartók First Violin Concerto, since he was indisposed.

However, his replacement, young Hungarian violinist **Barnabás Keleman**, who joined the Budapest Festival Orchestra and Iván Fischer in the same piece (26 August), produced one of the festival's most remarkable performances, full of easy charm yet also high-spirited and energetic. His Bartók was fresh and vigorous, prone to flashes both of great joy and of troubled reflection: he knew well that the composer wrote the piece as a musical love letter to the young violinist Stefi Geyer, who later rejected his attentions. Keleman was hugely charismatic, and a flamboyant character, playing up the first movement's introverted intensity with a wide vibrato and a few highly effective portamentos, and giving way to wild abandon in the second

LÁSZLO EMMER

movement's joyful effusions. Although his tone was sometimes quite piercing high up, his technique was tight and secure, and he clearly loved the piece, even dancing along to the orchestra when not playing.

Would that the same theatricality had been on show a couple of nights later, when young Latvian violinist **Baiba Skride** tackled Sofia Gubaidulina's *Offertorium* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Andris Nelsons (28 August). Despite her astonishing technical facility, Skride simply didn't have the single-minded stage presence to pull off such a dramatically demanding work. Her phrasing was silky-smooth in Gubaidulina's soaring, sometimes stratospheric melodies, and the rich, mellow tone she conjured for the piece's chantlike conclusion was profoundly moving. But in other sections she seemed like an actor unconvinced about her lines: the piece has such a personal, spiritual significance that if it's not carried off with utter conviction, it can seem a bit laughable.

The stratospheric contemporary works continued with Unsuk Chin's Violin Concerto, performed by **Viviane Hagner** with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Esa-Pekka Salonen (30 August). It was a well-nigh immaculate performance, technically astonishing and entirely engaging, full of fireworks but never without a profound sense of purpose. As in much music by Ligeti (with whom Chin studied), the concerto is shot through with a strange, phantasmagorical mischief, which Hagner rose to in vivid playing that ranged from a raw, rasping tone to innocent-sounding purity. She spent a lot of her time at the very top of her instrument's register, her digits sometimes dangling off the end of the fingerboard, but even in these high altitudes she had superb control of her sound. Although she was rather reserved on stage, her performance was a joy from start to finish, its ever-changing sound worlds a constant delight.

Young Russian violinist **Alina Pogostkina** chose a less exotic work for her Edinburgh International Festival debut, but there was still a twist: she performed her Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto not with a symphony orchestra, but with the modest forces of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra under Robin Ticciati (31 August). And suddenly there was a whole new perspective on the piece: pomp and grandeur were replaced by lightness, clarity and transparency. That was entirely in keeping with Pogostkina's precise, focused performance: she shaped phrases beautifully, articulated clearly and, even in the flashy first-movement cadenza, played with a heartfelt sincerity. Even so, there were moments when she was simply swamped by the orchestral sound, and she sometimes



**Cavaleri Quartet:**  
energetic yet seductive  
playing in Reich

seemed reluctant to project into the hall. Still, she put her rather inward-looking playing to good use at the start of the second-movement *Canzonetta*, and what the finale's boisterous theme lacked in mercurial wit it made up for with poise and beauty.

Over in the Queen's Hall, you couldn't seem to move for international string visitors – Leonidas Kavakos, Antonio Meneses, Trio Zimmermann and the Calder Quartet among them. There was a lot of excitement about the recital by the 17 string players of the **Australian Chamber Orchestra** (31 August), and their concert was certainly an event to remember – but maybe not for the right reasons. The programme was striking – Scelsi's weird *Anagamin* rubbing shoulders with C.P.E. Bach and Grieg – and you couldn't ignore the passion and conviction behind their intensely vivid, energetic performances. The C.P.E. Bach B flat major Sinfonia bristled with rhythmic verve and urgency, and director Richard Tognetti's string-orchestra transcription of the Grieg String Quartet in G minor was on a grand scale right from the start, its folksy episodes bordering on the aggressive. But at times it felt like watching a film on an IMAX screen, in 3D, with the volume, colour and contrast all at their maximum – you longed for something a little less hyper-real. Things suddenly relaxed when Tognetti's Grieg transcription thinned back to its original quartet forces, for example, and his performance of Latvian composer Peteris Vasks's violin concerto *Vox amoris* was generally luminous and restrained. But at other times, it all felt a bit too much.

The Queen's Hall recitals concluded with a visit from the **Emerson Quartet** (1 September), which tackled Thomas Adès's *The Four Quartets* vividly, if not especially compellingly. The same was true for its opening Mozart Quartet in D major K575: strangely, it seemed to take most of the first-movement exposition for the four players to gel together in a convincing

corporate sound. But in the second half, and their Beethoven Quartet in E flat major op.127, they seemed a different group: incisive, committed and passionate about the music. Their dramatic opening chords glowed with a dark fire, and they had an almost orchestral richness of sound at the end of the second movement. Their scherzo was exuberant, and the finale's more rustic episodes bounced along with eagerness and fun. It was David Finckel's final concert with the Emersons before Paul Watkins takes over as cellist, and his contributions were lively and forthright throughout – not least in the astonishing choice of encore, a fragile movement from Webern's Five Movements for String Quartet op.5.

Despite its reputation as the home of comedy, the Edinburgh Fringe has plenty of musical offerings, and in the Royal Over-Seas League's fortnight of concerts showcasing top young players, two string ensembles stood out. The London-based **Castalian Quartet** launched into Webern's *Langsamer Satz* with immediate confidence and richly Romantic intensity in a late-night concert (14 August), and the players carried those qualities over into an incisive performance of the Shostakovich Quartet no.11, strongly projected with energy and passion.

The **Cavaleri Quartet** won the special prize at the Paolo Borciani competition in 2011, and its playing was something quite special. In an early-morning recital (15 August), it gave a searing account of the Beethoven 'Serioso' Quartet op.95, fiery and tempestuous right from the start. But it was a late-night performance of Steve Reich's *Different Trains* (16 August) that really set the pulse racing. This was the ideal piece for the foursome's bright, energetic yet seductive playing, but despite their vigour, the players took on a beautifully veiled sound for the darkness of the second movement, and their radiant account of the valedictory final movement was astonishingly moving.