

# REVIEWS

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## THIS MONTH'S RECOMMENDED DISCS:

Our pick of the new releases



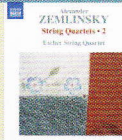
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## CONCERTS

### EDINBURGH

War, conflict and the role of the arts in either stoking the flames of valour or consoling in the shattered aftermath were the provocative if sombre themes of Jonathan Mills's final year as director of the Edinburgh International Festival – meaning plenty of music from before and after World War I, as well as from further afield in geography and time. As so often in Edinburgh, there was plenty of string music on offer – especially in a particularly rich series of morning chamber concerts at the Queen's Hall.

There was nothing specifically war-related in the **Artemis Quartet's** recital on 14 August, though – save perhaps for Bartók's Third Quartet, written during the radical ferment of the inter-war years. The Artemis players gave a remarkably clean, clear, thoughtful performance, with none of the raw roughness sometimes reserved for this astonishingly concentrated piece. Their highlight, though – as provocative as it was persuasive – was a Schubert 'Death and the Maiden' that veered between touching simplicity (in a sensitive slow movement, for instance) and tempestuous angst (in a tumultuous scherzo). It might have been the vigour with which the players attacked the first movement that caused first violinist Vineta Sareika to break her E string just a few passages in, but after a hasty readjustment, they were back and just as full-blooded as before – yet with such gleaming articulation that everything shone brightly.

The players of the **Pavel Haas Quartet** (28 August) managed to be both subtly blended and thrillingly soloistic in their bold recital. They threw themselves into their opener, the First Quartet by Erwin Schulhoff (who died in a Nazi concentration camp), with abandon, producing some astonishingly vivid textures amid the piece's

jolly dissonances and Bartók-like ostinatos. First violinist Veronika Jarůšková opened Shostakovich's Tenth Quartet with a solo of refined simplicity, and the foursome expertly paced the composer's slowly unfolding architecture – from a scherzo full of thrillingly demonic fury to an amiable ending that felt poignantly inconclusive. Their closing Brahms A minor Quartet, op.51 no.2, was fascinating – restless without feeling rushed, full of movement yet still expansive. Bristling with power yet also full of sensitive refinement, this was one of the festival's most memorable concerts.

The Queen's Hall's small stage felt crowded on 26 August when the 14 string players of the **Scottish Ensemble** were joined by the same number in 'Commonwealth Strings' – an ad hoc group put together of emerging players from across the Commonwealth. The concert hinged on Tippett's Concerto for Double String Orchestra (given a joyful if slightly deliberate performance), and beforehand, we'd heard a gutsy Elgar Introduction and Allegro and a sonorous Vaughan Williams *Tallis Fantasia* – whose final chord, held with sublime stillness and with each player's eyes firmly closed, ebbed away



Fascinating Brahms from the Pavel Haas Quartet

MARCO BONGIOVINE





Vadim Gluzman: noble and lyrical Barber

with infinitesimal slowness to silence. Most remarkable, though, were two Antipodean works: New Zealander Gareth Farr's striking *Relict Furies* (getting its world premiere), a setting of First World War-inspired poetry sung with richness and restraint by mezzo Sarah Connolly, and a hugely moving account of the Third Sonata for strings, 'Jabiru Dreaming', by the recently deceased Peter Sculthorpe.

The players conveyed Sculthorpe's intoxicating tapestry of birdsong, buzzing insects, didgeridoo mimicry and big tunes with utterly convincing passion – it was a magical, almost cinematic evocation of the Australian landscape.

Over in the Usher Hall, violin soloists were on the menu. You couldn't help feeling, though, that a point was being made in the programming of the Czech Philharmonic's concert under Jiří Bělohlávek (22 August), with **Nicola Benedetti** as soloist. Before her rich, enjoyable account of the Korngold Violin Concerto, the concert had opened with Janáček's *From the House of the Dead* Overture – which itself started life as a violin concerto. Orchestra leader Josef Špaček was thrillingly gutsy in the prominent solo part, lithe and colourful, from throaty tones on his G string up to sweetly soaring melodies high on the instrument. It was a remarkable display – and one that Benedetti, frankly, struggled to top.

**Vadim Gluzman** had the unenviable task of providing the light relief in a concert dominated by Bernstein's dark 'Kaddish' Symphony (24 August) – but his noble, lyrical account of the Barber Violin Concerto was the perfect foil to Bernstein's sprawling cry of anguish. Gluzman was gentle and thoughtful in a glowing first movement, and he caressed the

slow movement's melodies, before embarking on a doggedly determined, helter-skelter account of the moto perpetuo finale. The Royal Scottish National Orchestra offered fine, incisive support under US conductor John Axelrod.

Over in the unpredictable melting pot of the Fringe, though, things were more mixed. One of the highlights of the Royal Over-Seas League's fortnight-long concert series was a memorable late-night performance of Bartók's Fourth Quartet from the New Zealand-founded **Lazarus Quartet** (12 August): rhythmically incisive, powerful and full of character, it sometimes went a bit wayward in intonation but made up for that with sheer verve and enthusiasm. Glasgow-based flexible ensemble **Daniel's Beard** fared less well in a string quartet incarnation, however (14 August) – although the big, boomy acoustics of Canongate Kirk, its venue for a week of concerts, should take most of the blame. The players' frenetic finale to Haydn's 'Lark' Quartet merged into an indecipherable wash of sound. Their Shostakovich Third Quartet was committed and convincing, though on the whole you couldn't help thinking that more thought should have been given to balancing repertoire and venue.

DAVID KETTLE

## LONDON

**Daniel Hope (violin)**  
**Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic**  
**Orchestra/Sascha Goetzl**

ROYAL ALBERT HALL 29 JULY 2014

Gabriel Prokofiev wrote his Violin Concerto at the instigation of its soloist Daniel Hope, who gave its premiere at this BBC Prom. Hope also suggested it should be related to the centenary of the First World War, hence its subtitle '1914'. It uses a big orchestra with a formidable percussion section, against which Hope was sometimes a small voice as one ostinato pattern after another set out on a great crescendo. At the quiet start he repeated a simple impassioned phrase before introducing an angular march with clipped, crisp playing. As the first ostinato built up, his playing became fierce, with a rapid anguished vibrato in the heights of the E string and precise staccato playing of increasingly frantic and

taxing violin writing as the militaristic orchestra threatened to overwhelm him.

Melodic writing (when it came) could be disquieting. Hope brought exaggerated phrasing to a distorted melody at the end of the first movement, depicting the tsar in his study. In the third-movement Lento he fluttered like a bird before developing into a wild lyrical outburst, his beauty of tone almost ironic in this bleak context. He was disturbingly eloquent in the fourth movement, with disjointed utterances and grotesque glissandos. It was a masterly performance, if not always audible above the mechanistic orchestral writing.

TIM HOMFRAY

**Matthew Trusler (violin)**  
**BBC National Orchestra of**  
**Wales/Mark Wigglesworth**

ROYAL ALBERT HALL 6 AUGUST 2014

William Mathias's Violin Concerto – given its London premiere at this



Matthew Trusler: evocative and mesmerising playing in Mathias