

## **The National Youth Orchestra of Scotland**

### **Usher Hall Edinburgh 02.08.14**

Saturday's Usher Hall Concert by the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland was a taste of things to come. One was the bright and exciting future for some extremely talented Scottish musicians, the other a preview of the orchestral splendour we can expect when the Edinburgh Festival kicks off on Friday. This concert marked NYOS' 35th birthday and on this showing, they more than deserve to rub shoulders with the likes of the RSNO, BBC SSO and Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and it's not inconceivable that their ranks could be enhanced by NYOS players. The talent that abounds in this huge orchestra is evident. It just needs to be tapped into.

I had heard an excellent performance of Walton's Johannesburg Festival Overture by the NYOS Childrens' Orchestra not so long ago, but that proficiency was magnified considerably by the senior NYOS ensemble. It was rousing, vibrant and triumphant with conductor Michael Francis and the orchestra setting their stall out early on and promising a fabulous evening. And that's exactly what we got.

A challenge of more contemporary proportions followed in the shape of Sally Beamish's Trumpet Concerto, commissioned in 2003 by NYOS and dedicated to the evening's soloist Hakan Hardenberger. The Beamish rhythmic intricacies were more than evident with the trumpet very much the dominant force. Hardenberger's performance was flawless but I would have loved some extended melodic content to break the staccato sequences that prevailed. Beamish doesn't cut corners when composing for youngsters and the work does conjure up many demands that would deter a less-polished and competent group. NYCOS, in typical fashion, tackled it like consummate professionals.

Strauss' Alpine Symphony calls for a mammoth orchestra, one well within the capabilities of NYOS, with off-stage brass and every percussion instrument you can think of. The performance of NYOS was as triumphant as the work is massive, delivering a performance befitting such a gala occasion. Everyone deserves huge plaudits for executing a work that is a wonderful mix of excitement, serenity and brilliant orchestral imagery. It was a performance out of the top drawer, but then no-one should be surprised. That's what NYOS have always been about.

Garry Fraser