

Review: Music

Monday 14 July 2014

NYOS Junior Orchestra

Perth Concert Hall

Michael Tumelty

A rather bizarre parallel flitted through my mind on Friday night as the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland's Junior Orchestra powered into the finale of Bruch's Violin Concerto with violinist Jessica Coleman as a richly-impassioned soloist.

It occurred just at a moment where I felt the strain was beginning to show, especially in intonation, both in the soloist's playing and across the ensemble. I was reprimanding myself for being too critical: after all, some of these players are as young as eight; and later, on the train to Glasgow, I overheard a 13-year-old violinist discussing the performance with her mother in a refreshing, matter-of-fact manner.

The parallel was this: two of my favourite conductors are the RSNO's Thomas Sondergard and the BBC SSO's Ilan Volkov. Why? In each case I admire their powers of organisation, which is what articulates the music they direct. And that is exactly what Dutch conductor Roland Kieft brought to the NYOS Juniors' performances on Friday of Walton's Crown Imperial Overture, Bruch's concerto, Eric Coates' hugely-enjoyable Three Elizabeths' Suite, and, above all, Peter Longworth's dazzlingly-atmospheric, games-inspired Ludi, an extremely impressive set of vignettes which are concise, precise, and exactly to the point.

Despite any reservations about elements of intonation or whatever, everything the youngsters played was shaped by a sense of organisation, which not only articulated the music, but allowed its character and spirit to flow. And all of that was reinforced by the resulting confidence, which underpinned the fine orchestral balance (never to be taken for granted) across this marvellous young ensemble. On to the NYOS seniors next, on Wednesday at 7pm, with a meaty programme in Greyfriars Kirk.