

The Herald

Live Review:

National Youth Orchestra of Scotland at the City Halls, Glasgow



Michael Tumelty

Five Stars

THERE were some fabulous things in Tuesday's concert by the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland, not least the rare opportunity to hear Richard Strauss's *Macbeth*, an extremely dramatic and, I suspect, underrated symphonic poem, plus the dazzling, breath-taking interpretation of John McLeod's Piano Concerto, which received a performance by pianist James Willshire, playing entirely from memory, that was a tour de force of musicianship and virtuosity.

But I have to lead with the towering and emotionally-devastating performance by these masterly young orchestral musicians of Rachmaninov's Second Symphony. How do they do this at that age? Where do youngsters get that emotional maturity? Where do they find the experience that can give a performance the depth that this one so clearly possessed? The sheer chemistry of dynamic conductor Nicholas Collon (pictured) had much to do with harnessing and releasing it, of course. The whole thing was rich, robust, dark and endlessly-warm, with an electrifying second movement and a slow movement that ached with melancholy. And when the young girl on principal clarinet played the heart-stopping solo in that slow movement, I just melted away.

But in what is clearly a very fine crop of NYOS musicians this year, the youngsters were just as adept and idiomatic in their performance of McLeod's decisively-crafted and thrillingly-imagined Concerto, with their whiplash response to the composer's explosively energetic rhythms (McLeod, a sprightly 81, directed it himself) and as sensitive to James Willshire's declamatory, pyrotechnical playing as they were to the concerto's more atmospheric and intimate pages. Honours all round.

A great night for NYOS, and music-making in young Scotland.