

NYOS Symphony Orchestra Perth Concert Hall, 29-VII-2015
Summer Concert – Scottish Connections

There was a real buzz about the foyer of Perth Concert Hall before the NYOS Symphony Orchestra concert. It was good to see the place so busy and indeed there were only a very few single tickets left.

The National Youth Orchestras of Scotland had chosen Perth as their jumping off point for a short tour of China (Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin) starting the first of August.

The excitement was confirmed from the electrifying trumpets at the start of Shostakovich's Festive Overture and the answering rich cellos and basses onwards. The whole of this lively curtain raiser was full of the most vividly keyed up intensity allied with a joy of playing music, conductor Rory Macdonald there for each note, phrase and direction.

A fascinating, though much harder nut to crack followed: Eric Chisholm's Piano Concerto No.1 with the title Piobaireachd as it bases itself on the themes and gestures of classical Scottish bagpipe music. Starting with a slightly wavery oboe the first movement received a beautifully perceptive performance with internationally acclaimed pianist Danny Driver absolutely outstanding in the many facets of the solo part. More, colourful fun was the drive of the dance inspired second movement with its slightly Bartók inspired folk spicings. The slow movement had the most rapt start and conclusion, each registering with clarity. Highlights were the combination of first and second violins and the solos not only from Danny Driver but horn and woodwind. The Finale had verve and precision and went off like perfect fireworks, plus an outpouring of tumultuous warmth in a central section, before mounting excitement in a dash to a glittering end.

The romantic colossus of Rachmaninov's Second Symphony crowned the concert. From its start Rory Macdonald had the right balance between propulsion and lingering as the huge orchestra provided long breathed, freely emotional yet natural playing. He set an athletic Allegro and followed Rachmaninov's touch of hysteria to the climax with the balm of the violins. The youngsters of NYOS responded to his cracking pace for the Scherzo with sparkling articulate playing and the glow of the second theme. The playing of brass and side drum in the Trio was superb as were the brass and timpani taps at the end. Strings gave an ardent start to the Adagio followed by a super, serenely clam clarinet solo. Rory Macdonald nurtured golden-hearted string playing passing through a fine climax to ethereal playing and an end of tender warmth. The Finale had both ebullience and a touch of giddiness, just perfect for this triumphant ending. The only unconvincing part was when Rory Macdonald imposed a protracted slowing up.

To the delight of the packed audience NYOS also played their two encores for the Chinese tour: a Flower Drum Song from Feng Wang was joyously colourful with hand held gongs and extra drums phenomenally executed and to keep up the Scottish side a concatenation of 'weel kennt' jigs and reels played with verve.

Ian Stuart-Hunter