

NYOS Senior Orchestra
Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Four stars

GOOD Lord. What a total, comprehensive transformation in playing power in the NYOS Senior Orchestra on Wednesday night, from a watery, indefinite and uncomfortable account of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake Suite, worth two or three stars at best, to, within an hour, a blazing, rocketing and riveting performance of the Symphonic Dances from West Side Story that would have had Leonard Bernstein himself grooving to the electrifying playing of the teenage orchestra. He was here a long time ago, and I will never forget the sight of him doing just that to the rhythms of *Candide*.

The problem on Wednesday was the context. Because the orchestra was playing at the big education conference in the hall, the musicians were in at the deep end with Swan Lake. Nobody and nothing seemed comfortable. Nobody was warmed-up or on a roll. Conductor James Lowe seemed ill at ease. Soloists within the orchestra were edgy and uncertain. I know this band: it was not a performance to write home about. The instant the Tchaikovsky was done, the difference was palpable. You could feel the musicians settle into the groove and mood of Oliver Searle's *Accidental Dances*, with its lovely transatlantic accent and feeling of Copland with touches of Ives. And then the orchestra, the playing, James Lowe and the music all soared in *West Side Story*. The stunning textural clarity in the *Cool Fugue* was breath-taking, the impact of the dance (punch-up) at the gym was awesome, and the NYOS Seniors, in every department, played as though there was no tomorrow. Ultimately, it was a knockout performance.

Michael Tumelty, *The Herald Scotland*, 28 July 2016