

NYOS Senior Orchestra, Perth Concert Hall

20 July 2019

What do you give an orchestra of talented youngsters 13 and over to play? Something tame? Something simple? No, you give them two contemporary works and one from the Romantic era that stretches them to the very limit. That's the ethos of the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland, manifested in the concert by their senior orchestra on Saturday night in the Perth Concert Hall.

They opted for two relatively unknown works and one that didn't really do the composer justice. But more of Schumann's cello concerto later. Focus should start with Panufnik's Concerto Festivo and Kabalevsky's second symphony. The former is a work that if I never hear it again, I'll not be too perturbed. The latter – more please!

Either for effect or for other unknown reasons, Panufnik seems reluctant to combine his orchestral forces until the last movement. A raucous, brassy in-your-face opening movement was followed by a string only movement– with subtle percussion – that showed the composer did have a lyrical bone in his body. The final Giocoso was all 100 or so of the NYOS youngsters and while they gave their all, the work itself left a lot to be desired.

Giving their all is what I like about the NYOS set-up. With youthful enthusiasm allied to a considerable amount of skill, the joy of communing with classical music was patently obvious.

I wouldn't put the Kabalevsky symphony in my top ten, but the NYOS performance ensured it wouldn't be put in the context of "also-rans". It's bursting with melody, has loads of colour, clever orchestration – the treatment of the first movement's theme was ingenious – and there's a considerable amount for the players to get their teeth into. The tenderness of the elegiac middle movement contrasted beautifully with the outer movements. All in all, it was a five-star performance.

All one can say about the Schumann is that this was one he didn't quite get right. Plenty melody for sure, but nothing much to write home about. Thankfully, the mesmerising performance of soloist Alexey Stadler was far more memorable, though, as virtuosic and technically-astute as one could wish for. Such was his terrific performance, one almost forgot that NYOS were on stage too. It takes a lot to overshadow them.

Garry Fraser, The Courier