

Review: NYOS Symphony Orchestra, Albert Halls, Stirling: 4stars

Here's an irony. While instrumental education in Scotland is at crisis point, why is it we can field a full-scale national youth orchestra as good as this?

No room to answer that here; simply to report that Friday's rip-roaring concert in Stirling – the final leg of the NYOS Symphony Orchestra's three-concert summer tour – proved that somehow, somewhere we are producing musicians ripe and ready to pursue professional careers in music should they choose to do so.

This was a testing programme, launched by a biting overture from the pen of the early 20th-century Polish composer Grażyna Bacewicz, climaxing with Bartók's virtuosic Concerto for Orchestra, between which Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No1 provided an awesome, meaty challenge that was rigorously and joyously met.

Conductor Jessica Cottis is due enormous praise, given the incisive, eager response she elicited from three hard-hitting performances.

Bacewicz's overture, written in Warsaw in 1943 amid German occupation, couches anger and frustration in the same faux-triumphalism of, say, Shostakovich, a vicious dichotomy captured here, once the opening blurriness dissipated, by incendiary brass and turbocharged strings.

Guest soloist Daishin Kashimoto, first concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic, proved another inspirational factor, his hot-blooded delivery of the Shostakovich oozing lyrical intensity and rhythmic bite, qualities absorbed entirely within the orchestra's animated, accommodating response.

After a interval "divertissement" by a nimble NYOS wind quintet, it was more big guns with the Bartók, exceptional solo performances adding dazzle to yet another orchestral triumph.

Ken Walton, The Scotsman, August 2019