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Prom 42: Paavo Järvi flies the flag for Estonia

★★★★☆ ?

By [Mark Pullinger](#), 14 August 2018

Flags of blue, black and white were waved enthusiastically around the Royal Albert Hall and with good reason. Estonia celebrates 100 years of independence this year and this concert marked the first time *any* Estonian orchestra had visited the BBC Proms. [Paavo Järvi](#) founded the Estonian Festival Orchestra seven years ago, resident at the Pärnu Music Festival and combining Estonians with players from top international orchestras Järvi conducts around the world. The results was an impressive debut, offering fresh, lively interpretations of appropriately Nordic-Baltic repertoire.

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“carved from pine, crisp and fresh, surging with energy and athleticism”

Reviewed at Royal Albert Hall, London on 13 August 2018

PROGRAMME

Pärt, Symphony no. 3

Grieg, Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.16

[Debussy](#), Suite Bergamasque: Clair de lune

[Sibelius](#), Symphony no. 5 in E flat major, Op.82

Sumera, The Spring Fly

Alfven, Bergakungen (Mountain King Suite): Herd-maiden's dance, Op.37 no. 4

PERFORMERS

[Khatia Buniatishvili](#), *Piano*

Estonian Festival Orchestra

[Paavo Järvi](#), *Conductor*



Paavo Järvi conducts the

Estonian Festival Orchestra

© BBC | Chris Christodoulou

Flying the flag for Estonia was [Arvo Pärt's *Symphony no. 3*](#), a work dedicated to Paavo's father, the indefatigable Neeme Järvi, who conducted the première in Tallinn in 1972. The Third predates Pärt's *tintinnabuli* style but reflects his then fascination with plainchant and early polyphony. Pärt often treats the orchestra like a giant organ, particularly in the middle movement where strings and elegiac trumpet lead a sombre chant. Pärt paints in great blocks, like an aural Mondrian, focusing on combinations of instruments before switching to a completely different instrumental colour. Oboe and clarinet play in parallel until a theatrical tubular bell strike veers the focus away to the brass. Caliginous double basses were joined by cellos in the twilight before shafts of brass light pierced the cathedral windows. Most fearsome of all was a furious timpani assault, the composer briefly abandoning the dignified tread for a moment of high drama. To cheers, the 82-year old Pärt took his bow – and sent a hug to the entire audience – a modest figure, who practically leapt up the steps to return to his seat.

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Sarah Batschelet, 23rd January

Paavo Järvi conducted the Estonian Festival Orchestra that he founded in select works by Northern composers.

★★★★☆

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Stefan Pillhofer, 16th August

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Young-Jin Hur, 4th June

Paavo Järvi gave a real sense of occasion to the evening, though the Berlioz neither embraced frenzy nor nodded to the fantastical.

★★★★☆

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Alexander Hall, 11th April

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of its first performance, Paavo Järvi directs the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen in Brahms' Requiem, with the Latvian State Choir and two outstanding soloists.

★★★★☆

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Arvo Pärt takes a bow with Paavo Järvi

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Rampaging across the fjords came [Khatia Buniatishvili](#) for an exciting performance of Grieg's evergreen *Piano Concerto in A minor*... exciting, although not always for the right reasons. The EFO played this concerto with Elisabeth Leonskaja in Pärnu last week and I can't imagine Leonskaja played it anything like this. There was an edge-of-the-seat atmosphere as Buniatishvili set off at an impatient gallop, Järvi often having to rein the tempo back. Despite plenty of eye contact, pianist and conductor seemed to play cat and mouse, the Georgian teasing with quixotic rubatos. Crouched over the keyboard, flicking back her black mane of hair, Buniatishvili's cadenza was rhapsodic, with buttery pianissimos. The Estonian violins breathed dewy freshness into the Adagio but the finale sprinted out of sight on the verge of recklessness – Grieg's trolls high on acid. As if to compensate, Buniatishvili's encore was a *Clair de lune* so slow it nearly stalled.



Paavo Järvi conducts the
Estonian Festival Orchestra

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Some performances of Sibelius' mighty Fifth Symphony are hewn from granite or sculpted from marble. The Estonians' account was carved from pine, crisp and fresh, surging with energy and athleticism. Järvi, pulling long, fluid baton shapes, encouraged supple string playing and splendid woodwind articulation. A cantabile bassoon crooned his song over swarming strings; grainy trumpets sent their rising figures aloft joyously. Pizzicatos in the second movement landed softly like drops of melting snow rather than icy pin-pricks, while the finale's great "swan theme" rocked nobly in the horns against spiccato double bass snaps. Invigorating stuff and the highlight of the evening, although the second encore, the *Herd-maiden's Dance* from Hugo Alfven's *Mountain King*, pushed it close, a high-spirited return for the trolls.

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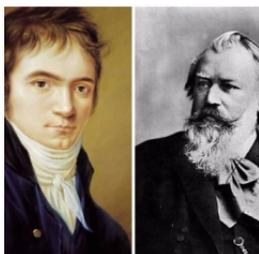
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The Top 10 Piano Concertos



Mark Pullinger

Mark is one of Bachtrack's editors and Chair of the Music Section of The Critics' Circle. An experienced opera critic, with a passion for Verdi, he can often be found propping up a standing place at the ROH. He also reviews concerts and dance, with a particular love for Russian and French repertoire. Mark contributes to Gramophone and Opera magazines and blogs at Beckmesser's Quill.

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