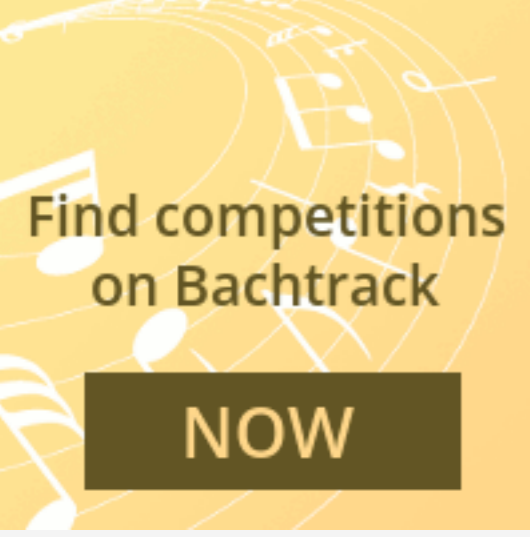
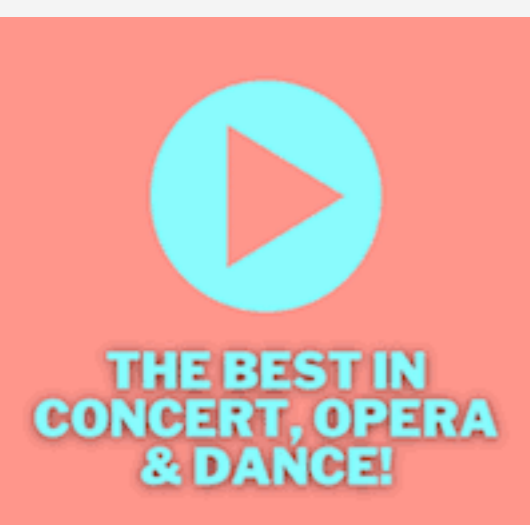




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The Estonian Festival Orchestra covers itself in glory at the Pärnu Music Festival

By [Alexander Hall](#), 17 July 2022

Sometimes it is the quality of the playing that bowls you over from the start. There are of course top-drawer orchestras all over the world, but hearing the [Estonian Festival Orchestra](#) at the Pärnu Festival for the first time was like finding a sparkling jewel in the most unexpected place. Drawn from the cream of European players, Paavo Järvi has created in the EFO an ensemble which is not only astonishingly flexible but which also has a depth of tonal resources not often matched elsewhere.



Paavo Järvi and the Estonian Festival Orchestra
© Tõiv Jõul | Pärnu Music Festival

It was the string section that had the first opportunity to shine. Lutoslawski's *Musique funèbre à la mémoire de Béla Bartók* carries the only dedication which he gave to another composer in any of his works. Completed in 1958, it is more than simply a tribute to a great predecessor and lover of experimentation. Like many other short but powerful pieces for string orchestra, it takes the listener on an emotional journey of grief and loss. Järvi built this lament inexorably from the opening pair of cellos, voices murmuring as if from afar, through the shuddering intensity of the *Apogeu*m section where upper strings cut and sliced with a rare ferocity, balanced by thudding counterpoint from the lower sections. This was a collective howling and moaning like winter winds tearing through a desolate landscape, eating into the soul, before the piece exhausted itself in a *morendo* for the principal cello. Throughout the clarity of articulation was stunning, all Lutoslawski's individual textures braided together into a rich tapestry of sound. In its combination of finesse and power this performance had a rare quality.

The EFO also proved themselves to be warmly supportive accompanists in [Stefan Dohr's](#) performance of the *Horn Concerto no. 2* by Richard Strauss, in which the sunlit uplands of the central *Andante* were especially striking. From an opening graced by a fine oboe solo and Dohr's soft legato entry, there were distinct echoes of the famous Act 3 trio from *Der Rosenkavalier*, moments of compositional recall tinged with aching nostalgia. Equally impressive was a feathery-light impishness which Dohr found in the Finale, a fleet-footed catch-me-if-you-can approach, to which his Messiaen encore was the perfect foil as well as being an excellent example of his prodigious range.



Stefan Dohr and Paavo Järvi
© Taavi Kull | Pärnu Music Festival

In Tchaikovsky's *Fifth Symphony* Järvi never over-indulged the brooding that retards some accounts of the opening *Andante*, keeping the mood buoyant with prominent clarinets and a lightness of tread in the following *Allegro con anima* section. Later, there were already intense sparks of electricity that Järvi struck from the strings and especially the imposing trombones, tempered only by the mellifluous character of the woodwind, and this galvanising energy carried through to the sweep of the Finale. The entire performance was all of a piece, aided by having the briefest of pauses between movements.

Both the *Andante cantabile* and *Valse* benefited from a balletic elegance which seemed to come from the far reaches of Tchaikovsky's favourite composer Mozart. As the slow movement wound down from a powerful climax there was a touching tenderness at its close.



Paavo Järvi and the Estonian Festival Orchestra
© Tõiv Jõul | Pärnu Music Festival

How would Järvi end the Finale? Would it be a triumphant victory over Fate or a stoic acceptance that Fate cannot be defeated? Järvi chose the former, making the blood race with the tingle factor. It was like being sucked inextricably into a vortex from which there was no escape. Bracing, heady and ultimately very satisfying.

This evening's parade of formidable music-making at the highest level came to a stirring conclusion with two orchestral encores: the Polonaise from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* and the Shepherd Girl's Dance from Hugo Alfvén's *Bergakungen*.

Alexander's press trip was funded by the Pärnu Music Festival and Visit Estonia

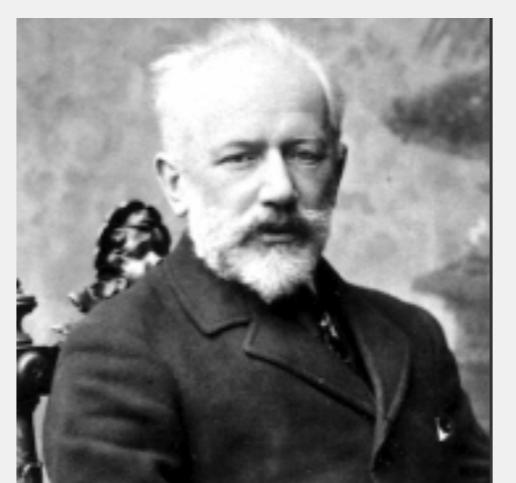
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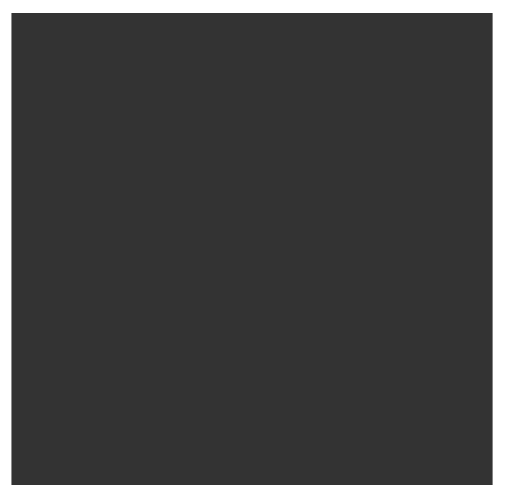


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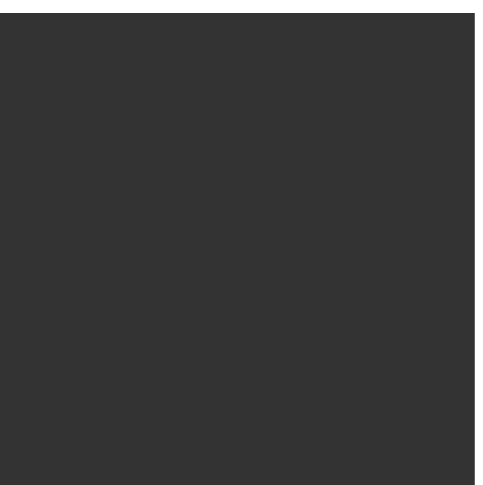
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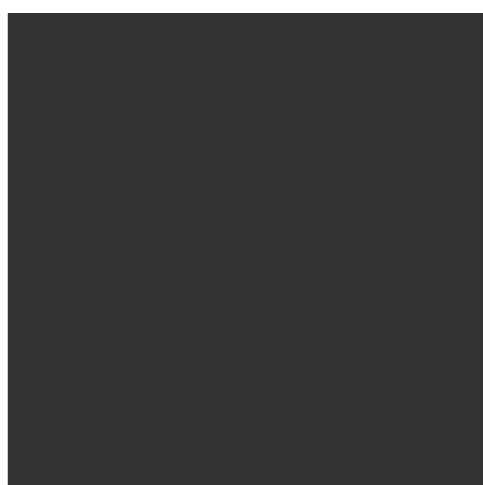
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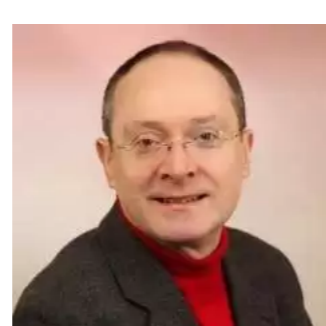
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Alexander Hall

Alexander Hall divides his time between London and Hamburg, having spent a lifetime writing in some form or other: fiction, academic research, educational materials and professional translations. He has been an avid concert-goer from his teenage years with fond memories of many of the giants of the past, including Klemperer, Karajan, Böhm, Bernstein and Carlos Kleiber. For him the symphony orchestra is one of the greatest artistic creations of all time.

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“like finding a sparkling jewel in the most unexpected place”

Reviewed at Pärnu Concert Hall, Pärnu on 16 July 2022

PROGRAMME

Lutoslawski, *Musique funèbre* (Funeral Music)

Strauss R., Horn Concerto no. 2 in E flat major AV132

Messiaen, *Des canyons aux étoiles: Appel interstellaire*

Tchaikovsky, Symphony no. 5 in E minor, Op.64

Tchaikovsky, Eugene Onegin: Polonaise

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

PERFORMERS

Stefan Dohr, *French horn*

Paavo Järvi, *Conductor*

Estonian Festival Orchestra



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