

**Arvo Pärt**

Symphony No.3

**Grieg**

Piano Concerto in A-minor, Op.16

**Sibelius**

Symphony No.5 in E-flat, Op.82

Khatia Buniatishvili  
(piano)Estonian Festival  
Orchestra  
Paavo Järvi
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programme>


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## Prom 42: Estonian Festival Orchestra/Paavo Järvi – Arvo Pärt & Sibelius – Khatia Buniatishvili plays Grieg

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Monday, August 13, 2018 Royal Albert Hall, London

*Written by David Gutman*

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Yet another summertime scratch band but a very good one. Since 2011 the always-peripatetic Paavo Järvi has touched base at the Pärnu Festival, overseeing its evolution into a kind of alternative Lucerne for Estonian musical talent while drawing in guest players from more venerable European ensembles. Unfortunately, on the occasion of its Proms debut, the ensemble's bright clarity only really suited the first of the three scheduled works.

To Arvo Pärt's stylistically transitional Third Symphony the super-group brought passion as well as transparency. It is music that now seems to sit quite comfortably with other quiescent, vaguely postludial Symphonies from the Soviet bloc and if this account could not replicate the sheer strangeness of Neeme Järvi's 1989 UK premiere (a Prom featuring the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra) it was stronger and fuller and almost as hypnotically compelling. The octogenarian composer, still bouncing about like a student, was present to take the applause, looking much as he did all those years ago when he turned

up at the much-missed Almeida Festival. Might the Third eventually prove to be one of his profounder masterpieces despite sounding at times like film cues for some medieval murder mystery? Possibly. But it would be good to hear more from his earlier iconoclastic phase.



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change of tone for the Grieg. While Khatia Buniatishvili is an exceptionally gifted pianist, her showboating, Lang Lang-ish style of presentation is not the only problem one has with her performances. The pianist she most resembles is Martha Argerich but this is an Argerich without taste or discipline, persistently rushing her fences in transitional passages and rather confusing even this scrupulously disciplined band. Paavo Järvi is one of the best, most attentive accompanists in the business yet there was no way to ensure complete unanimity with so self-indulgent a soloist. After the old-school fireworks, she opted for a tranquil encore. The outer sections of 'Clair de lune' (from Debussy's Suite bergamasque) were played so slowly as to function only as sound sculpture, the core of the piece being delivered in her impetuous vein. That soft, liquid tone is undeniable gorgeous, but still... In Pärnu last week, Elisabeth Leonskaja was Järvi's pianist and it would be difficult to imagine a more utterly different artistic personality!

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Following the interval the Sibelius was the night's real disappointment, the more so given the way the spectre of the Finnish master hangs over aspects of the Pärt. Dispensing with the score, the conductor opted for a curiously low-key, almost domestic conception in which rhetoric was underplayed and harmonic movement taken for granted. Is this music he knows too well? Or was it just that there weren't enough players to realise the material's craggier aspects? Certainly the antiphonally seated violins failed to produce much tone for all the intermittent glories of woodwinds and brass. For some listeners the argument (kept on the move, never becalmed) may have emerged refreshed. I can only report that I found the highlighting of secondary bits of line and texture rather a trial. The team swung into the Finale's 'Swan Hymn' with a sort of casual nonchalance; we were vouchsafed the aggressive *spiccato* clatter of double basses but where was the warmth and depth of the overall sound? The last two of the work's final chords were rendered with comparable idiosyncrasy, Thor swinging a slightly juddering miniature hammer.

There were two encores, the first arguably earned (though much too long), the second redundant given that the Arena was emptying. Neither was announced. The first could have been Nino Rota on an off-day. Launched in a vaguely klezmer style, it was a waltz from Lepo Sumera's music for *The Spring Fly* (a film). The second, the 'Herdmaiden's Dance' from Swede Hugo Alfvén's *The Mountain King*, is a modest gem that Thomas Dausgaard and the BBC Philharmonic offered as an extra in 2001 with Sakari Oramo and the Stockholm Philharmonic following suit in 2011. It must be popular in the Nordic countries and the Estonian Festival Orchestra played it very well indeed.

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Very fair and balanced review. The Part was good although somewhat arcane in style and bordering on monotonous at times (and that is from a "Cantus in memorium..." fan!).

Like you, I found the performance of the Grieg was fluid with an accomplished technique, but at times I felt she was just showing off - there was a set of chromatic triplets which she played with the right hand alone, left hand playing with her hair in an almost "look - one hand!" fashion. And the tempo - there is rubato and there is all-over-the-place and we had too much of the latter and not enough of the former. There were points where the togetherness - the concerto-ness - of the piece were lost. I'm with you on the Debussy as well - it needs rubato but not massive swings in tempo. Yes the middle is difficult and yes we know you can play it at-speed, but is that musically correct?

The Sibelius was lacking - the swans were in-flight but they weren't gloriously flying. I actually quite enjoyed the secondary lines - the 'cello statements I'd never heard before - but this didn't make up for the lack of the soar that I need at the end. And the final chords didn't quite cut it.

Encore number 1 (ABA) should have finished after the first A - Jaarvi chided the audience for clapping at the wrong place but that was because as an encore, it was enough. Frankly, I'd rather have had Encore 2 instead - the solo spots really did allow the orchestra and more importantly the highly accomplished individuals in it to shine. The quality of this orchestra, their togetherness yet individual skills is undeniable and I'd like to hear more of them in orchestral staples.

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