

ESTONIAN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

HIGHLIGHTS OF REVIEWS FROM THE 2019 PÄRNU MUSIC FESTIVAL

The orchestra is making international waves - including an impressive debut at the BBC Proms last summer - but to hear them on their own turf in front of its adoring home audience gave the perfect introduction to this festival's ethos.

Mark Pullinger , bachtrack.com, 19 July 2019

Here there are no egos, but truly passionate people in making and listening to the best music.

Pablo Rodriguez, El Pais, 23 July 2019

Above all there is the Estonian Festival Orchestra, the backbone of this music week and which has long proved itself internationally on tour! The latest, great baby of the great educator Paavo Järvi ... And year after year you can see and hear the artists evolve, open up, listen to each other.

This year's orchestral formation seems young, but that is deceptive. A glance at the program book reveals that alongside a few scholars, on stage are the best musicians from some of the most important orchestras, some of which are connected with Paavo Järvi : in addition to various Estonian orchestras, these are the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, the Orchestre National de France and the hr Symphony Orchestra, the Russian National Orchestra and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, the Dresden Philharmonic, the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra and the Munich Philharmonic, the Finnish Opera Orchestra, the Turku Philharmonic and the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Swedish Philharmonic and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, the Budapest Festival Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Cleveland Orchestra.

Manuel Brug, Brugs Klassiker, 19 July 2019

Paavo Järvi brings together his Estonian Festival Orchestra which he composes ad hoc, of handpicked musicians. Immediately sensitive, the complicity between instrumentalist and conductor allowed a remarkable economy of rehearsals and injected the concert with a truly breathtaking energy and virtuosity.

The final evening, directed by Paavo Järvi, featured Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* where the intensity of the bass Ain Anger brought the audience to the brink of tears, was followed by a relentless Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 2, in which the mastery of rhythm and form unleashed a tragic power to nail us to our chairs.

Paul de Louit, Diapason, 7 August 2019

The Estonian Festival Orchestra is home to some of the best European orchestral players, including Estonians working abroad (Concertgebouworkest, London Symphony Orchestra, Orchester National de France, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Frankfurt Radio Symphonists...). The concert master of the EFO is Florian Donderer, a longtime concert master of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and leader of the Signum Quartet, a versatile musician who excels in both orchestral and chamber music, and who also performs as a soloist and conductor. As Neeme Järvi points out, each of the EFO members, no matter where they sit, has the qualities of the first desk players in their groups.

Some journalists have compared the EFO to the Lucerne ensemble founded by Claudio Abbado ... Measured by musicality, interpretive skills, technique, respect for each other and a warm relationship with the conductor, this must surely be true.

Alena Sojková, Harmonie Magazine, Czech Republic 13 September 2019

About Nielsen Symphony No. 1

Nielsen's First Symphony is full of defiance, excitement, but also tenderness. The orchestra played this work on a world class level, especially admirable were the precision in the interplay and dynamics, the excellence of the strings and the perfect phrasing

Alena Sojková, Harmonie Magazine, Czech Republic 13 September 2019

... the red-blooded, in-your-face muscle of Carl Nielsen's First Symphony, (was) given a terrific performance. Järvi's immaculate conducting, peppered with smiles and winks at the leader, kept the reins taut, but Nielsen's exuberance

burst forth at every opportunity, especially the rapier-like parry and thrust from the brass at the close of the haughty Allegro orgoglioso first movement. The strings, powered by a bass section of seven (five of them women) really dug into the Andante, while the emphatic attack in the joyous finale was infectious.

Mark Pullinger , bachtrack.com, 19 July 2019

This orchestral opening concert ends with an impressive 1st Symphony by Carl Nielsen, a special Paavo Järvi favourite. He clearly demonstrates how in this youthful work the melodic is determined again and again by a major scale with a small septime. He also has an open conductor's ear for Nielsen's beloved alternation between major and minor third ... The orchestra sounds like a harmonious cast. The groups are finely balanced, superbly synchronous, but never mechanically played.

Manuel Brug, Brugs Klassiker, 19 July 2019

About Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 2

... The tour de force came after the interval, with Paavo Jarvi's irresistibly driven interpretation of Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony ... the finale's high-kicking variations virtually lifted us out of our seats. No more exciting official ending to a festival could possibly be imagined.

... this is definitely one of the world's great orchestras, and it's here to stay.

David Nice, theartsdesk.com, 14 August 2019

... it was Tchaikovsky who found his liquid element in the second half. Järvi again relied on another exceptional and less frequented symphony, such as the Second, subtitled "Little Russia", for its relationship with Ukraine. And not only did he direct an unforgettable version of the work, but he found the ideal formula to mould that special atmosphere experienced throughout these days at the festival. That joy of making music together at the highest level, as a transcript of the legendary motto of Claudio Abbado in Lucerne.

... It's a symphony packed with wonderful music, yet it needs a vivid performance to make it come alive. And that's exactly what Järvi and the EFO delivered. Alec Frank-Gemmill, principal horn of the Gothenburg Symphony, glowed in the opening variant on *Down the Mother Volga* in the slow introduction

before Järvi wound the tension superbly to launch into the first movement's *Allegro vivo* section, the strings crackling with energy. The second movement march was humorously performed, the woodwinds like puckish monks sneaking back into the monastery after a night on the tiles, while double basses and cellos really powered the scampering Scherzo. **But it was the finale which took one's breath away. After playing up the mock bombast of the opening brass fanfare, Järvi punctured it completely with the cheeky string interplay on variations on the folk song *The Crane*, finishing with a gloriously unbuttoned coda.**

Pablo Rodriguez, El Pais, 23 July 2019

The orchestra literally bites into the most beautiful horn soli and swaying folklore, jagged marching rhythms and to the finale into the Great Gate of Kiev, which also curves and opens up to the soundscapes of a Tchaikovsky exhibition. Paavo Järvi has the best handle on this, drives, holds back. It may also be glaring, but the matted harmony of the ensemble is always to be felt. This eventually explodes in an apotheosis of the sheet metal, Tchaikovsky orgasm pure.

Manuel Brug, Brugs Klassiker, 22 July 2019

About Tüür

L'ombra della croce, by Estonian composer Erkki-Sven Tüür, showed, at the outset, the quality and depth of the EFO. Tüür, who this year has been the resident composer of the festival, as a celebration of his 60th birthday, he wrote this work as a curious experiment going back to the style of his youth but with maturity. That "other me" that an artist should never avoid.

... But the real event of the festival was the closing concert, Sunday, July 21. A very personal program of Paavo Järvi which he performed with the EFO and which began with another composition of Tüür with a very direct title: *Sow the Winds...* An intense orchestral score, from 2015, that puts climate change, immigration and the regrowth of totalitarianism on the table. The chisel with its "vector method" culminates in a devastating end.

Pablo Rodriguez, El Pais, 23 July 2019