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Tuesday, 14 August 2018

Prom 42: the first Estonian orchestra at the Proms - Paavo Järvi and the Estonian Festival Orchestra

Labels: [BBC](#), [concert review](#), [Proms](#), [Tallinn](#)



Paavo Järvi and the Estonian Festival Orchestra (Photo © Kaupo Kikkas)

Nordic & Baltic countries, [Arvo Pärt's Symphony No. 3](#) (from Estonia), [Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto](#) (from Norway) and Jean Sibelius' *Symphony No. 5* (from Finland). The pianist in the Grieg was the Georgian pianist [Khatia Buniatishvili](#).

Arvo Pärt's *Symphony No. 3* was written in 1971, a period of transition for the composer when he was re-considering his technique and would eventually create the tintinabuli style for which he is best known. This symphony has moved away from the modernist style of his earlier works whilst it has not yet reached the tintinabuli style. Written in a single movement with three sections playing continuously, the work is based around a series of motifs which evoke plainsong, and it is this medieval style of musical discourse which dominates the symphony.

The piece started with a single clarinet line, evocative and rather mysterious in its neo-medieval shaping. Pärt shapes his material in blocks, sometimes a single line, sometimes a few instruments and sometimes the whole orchestra, and silence is important. This is one of the pointers to his later style. Pärt's writing for single instruments, or a single musical line drew a strongly spiritual sense out of the piece. Conductor Paavo Järvi did not give a lot away, but he drew focussed, concentrated playing from his orchestra. The composer Arvo Pärt (now 82) was present for the performance, receiving huge applause at the end.

The Estonian Festival Orchestra is very much Paavo Järvi's orchestra. Founded in 2011 it is the orchestra in residence at Järvi's [Pärnu Festival](#) in Estonia, and the orchestra brings together Estonian musicians with musicians from all around the world, with players from many of the major orchestras.

At the Proms the orchestra was then joined by the Georgian pianist Khatia Buniatishvili for Grieg's *Piano Concerto* from 1868 (revised 1907). The famous opening introduced us to Buniatishvili's impulsive, poetic piano playing and then to the tightly rhythmic, highly pointed and shapely orchestral contribution. Both Buniatishvili and Järvi took a highly poetic view of the work, it was not without explosions but these soon died down and the overall impression was of a highly interior poeticism. What flashes of fire there were in Buniatishvili's playing reached a climax in the cadenza. The second movement was highly shaped and very much an artful view of Grieg's folk-inspired melodies. Buniatishvili's fingerwork here was extremely delicate and both she and the orchestra again created a poetic, interior sense of the music. There was no doubting that it was highly musical and touching, but I have to confess that I did rather want a blast of bracing Nordic air in the music. The finale was fast, with lovely crisp rhythms and some impressive chamber-scale performance from the orchestra, whilst Buniatishvili's fingerwork was impressive in its speed and delicacy. This was a very particular view of the concerto, popular with the audience but a take on Grieg's exuberant work which I would not want to live with.

Buniatishvili gave us an encore, a darily quiet and very slow rendition of Debussy's *Clair de lune*.

After the interval the air turned rather more bracing for Sibelius' *Symphony No. 5* from 1915 (revised 1916 & 1919) which Järvi conducted from memory. The opening movement unfolded slowly with the music sounding spacious, though Järvi's tempi were not overly slow. The movement is written in waves of sound, building and breaking as Sibelius tantalises with fragments of his complete melody. Underlying all this Järvi gave the music a sense of slow, unstoppable growth, which culminated in the extreme rush (the programme note compared it to white-water rafting) of the movements closing moments, though throughout neither Järvi nor the orchestra lost a moment of control. The second movement was all control and elegance, with a lovely clarity of detail. As the richly textured music developed, Järvi and the orchestra drew out an undercurrent of things happening beneath the surface. The final started with quiet excitement, the rhythms really tight and again a feeling of unstoppable momentum. The first full statement of the

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main theme was magical, finely phrased by the woodwind section, yet Järvi also kept the excitement burning away in the string figures underneath. The ride to the symphonies conclusion was both thrilling and gripping.

We were treated to two encores from the orchestra. I am informed that they were *Spring Fly* by the Estonian composer Lepo Sumera (1950-2000), and *Vallflickans Dans* by the Swedish composer Hugo Alfvén (1872-1960).

The orchestra's first disc is now out, Paavo Järvi conducting Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 6* and *Sinfonietta*, available [from Amazon](#)



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Posted by [Robert Hugill](#) at Tuesday, August 14, 2018



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Patrick Hawes & the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at Abbey Road Studios (Photo Tony Simpson) Patrick Hawes ' Great War Symphony ...



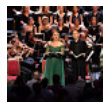
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Matthew O'Keeffe and members of Brixton Chamber Orchestra When doing an interview for this blog earlier this year, it turned out tha...

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