

IT'S BBC PROM TIME AGAIN !!

You may remember an article I wrote last summer about the Proms, which ended with the statement 'I for one will certainly be going again'. Well I did. Twice in five days, but the entertainment could not have been more different on both occasions. Alright, both were full symphony orchestras with lunatic conductors and outrageously gifted musicians, each of which had the audiences savouring every last drop of the musical delights on offer. Even if you are not a classical music fan the fact that the events were in the Royal Albert Hall, one of the most amazing buildings on the planet, made the events so stunning that my mere words do not do justice to the Proms.

In the red corner: Prom number 5. A 'proper' Prom concert. Some amazing virtuosity, classical pieces both well known and avant garde, with all the traditions including the currently controversial subject of whether or not to applaud between movements.

In the blue corner: Prom number 10. The Doctor Who Prom. A concert that had monsters wandering amongst the crowd, music that was recognisable from the telly if you are a Dr Who fan, a selection of very well known classical works, and an appearance from the Doctor himself.

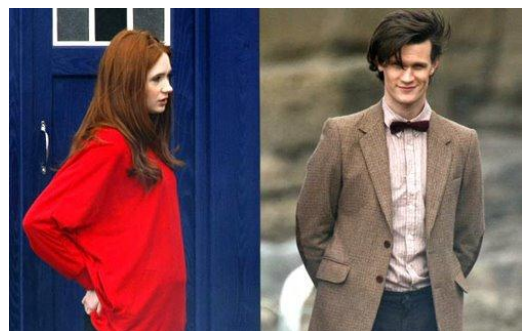


Prom number 5 was performed by the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Semyon Bychkov, (pictured) for whom this was his last performance after 13 years in charge. The first piece was Wagner's Lohengrin Prelude which had the audience amazed. This was followed by Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto with soloist Viviane Hagner who had the crowd completely spellbound. Lauren and Kirsten informed me that for a violinist this is the holy grail, the bees knees. I can see why. If I could play my guitar as quickly and as accurately as

she played the violin, well I'd be playing the Royal Albert Hall too, instead of the Feltham ex-servicemen's club. I digress. Exquisite violin playing. I can honestly say I have never seen the like before.

Then came the slightly odd piece, in the form of Gunther Schuller. I can only describe his offering as...well, it was as if the high school orchestra had been joined by the kindergarten and their pots, pans, triangles, maracas, etc. It was the only part of the evening when my concentration went walkabout. What's for tea tomorrow? Who's going to win the cricket? What's that strange noise? Then came the intermission. Not a minute too soon. The second session was amazing. It was Richard Strauss's Alpine Symphony. Again, marvellous musicianship with a series of great tunes building up to a wonderful crescendo augmented by a wind machine (a glorified tombola raffle drum) and a thunder machine (a large sheet of suspended aluminium) and a huge amount of enthusiasm from both the orchestra and the crowd. Marvellous.

Prom number 10, by contrast, was a mixture of tradition and pure theatre. I didn't know quite what to expect. The music was supplied by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the London Philharmonic Choir, with conductors Ben Foster and Grant Llewellyn seemingly taking turns. The evening started with Amy Pond (Karen Gillan who plays the Doctor's assistant) setting the scene by introducing music from the TV series and warning of monsters in the vicinity. There was a



lot of Doctor Who music (all composed by Murray Gold who accompanied on piano) and a lot of monsters throughout the evening including Cybermen and Daleks amongst others, and much merriment was had by all those who, without a sofa to hide behind, had to accept their rather enjoyable fate. The Doctor himself (Matt Smith) made a spectacular appearance and chose a small boy in the audience to help him out with some space/time/continuum? trickery, which must have made the little lad's day, and was highly amusing anyway.



As for the classics on offer, well, the first was a piece by John Adams called 'A short ride in a fast machine', quite appropriate for a Timelord with a Tardis. The next did not need any introduction. Gustav Holst- Mars- from the Planets Suite is probably my own personal favourite piece of classical music, and the first I actually bought as a 10 year old boy. Until now I had never seen it played live. What a treat. Then followed one of those pieces everyone knows but no one knows what it is. It's by Orff and it's called Carmina Burana 'O Fortuna', which I believe was the 'Old Spice' advert off the telly years ago. This was the chance

for the (huge) choir to really show what they could do, and boy did they. The finale was another old favourite. Die Walkure, The ride of the Valkyries by Wagner (illustrated). Another one of those tunes everyone knows but not everyone knows who composed it. Stirring stuff indeed.

Now, I could get really stuffy and traditional by saying that telly music has no place at a BBC Prom, but I won't. The reason is this. The Dr Who music is up there with the best of them. I know it's modern and made for the telly but the next time you watch an episode, don't. Turn the picture down and listen to the music. It is exciting, tuneful, stirring and downright enjoyable. I didn't realise it myself until this concert. The fact that so many unmistakable traditional rousing classical pieces were played on the same evening made for a wonderful feast of entertainment anddare I say it (again)...I for one will certainly be going again !!

Gary Marsh

