

PROMS 2023

Tonhalle-Orchester Zurich/Jarvi review — a Prom that brought fresh power to the classics

Royal Albert Hall

NEW

Geoff Brown

Thursday August 31 2023, 12.00pm BST, The Times

Music



Paavo Jarvi leads his Tonhalle-Orchester Zurich and the soloist Augustin Hadelich
ANDY PARADISE

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★★★★☆

No concert containing Dvorak's *New World* Symphony and Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto would be a leading contender in a contest for unusual programming. But when the performances are as sharp and fresh as those on offer from the versatile Estonian Paavo Jarvi and his Tonhalle-Orchester Zurich, it really does feel as if you might be hearing these mighty warhorses for the very first time.

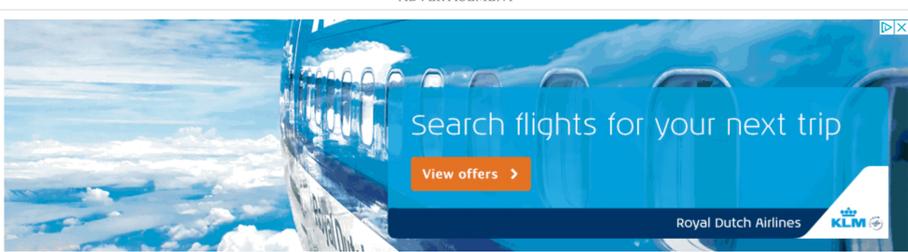
Those crisp triple timpani thwacks early on in Dvorak's first movement shook with dynamite force, as did the five punchy chords that launched the concert's slightly novel curtain-raiser, Beethoven's overture *The Consecration of the House* (not heard at the Proms for 20 years). Our ears too were immediately struck by the cor anglais' fragile but soulful pursuit of the Dvorak slow movement's famous heart-tugging theme, subsequently decorated with delicious changing hues and the most piquant of tempo hesitations.

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There may have been fewer revelations in the following scherzo and finale — slightly more mechanical movements anyway than the free-flowing wonders of the symphony's first half. But this was still a generously nuanced reading that cast such a spell on the packed Albert Hall that clapping between movements never happened. Zurich's Tonhalle-Orchester has been conducted by Jarvi since 2019 and, at this rate, I hope he stays there evermore.

Sonic delights in Tchaikovsky's concerto were less particular, but real just the same, and came embedded in the clean, caring and temperate approach of the soloist Augustin Hadelich, looking delightfully younger than his age of 39. In his hands Tchaikovsky the neurotic took a back seat to Tchaikovsky the melodic spellbinder. Hadelich's secret weapon — aside from his brain, fingers and heart — might well have been his violin: a big-toned, boisterously textured 1744 Guarneri previously associated with the Polish violinist Henryk Szeryng, who probably used it when he gave four performances of the same concerto at the Proms in the 1960s. This violin obviously knew exactly what it was doing, and wasn't put off either by the slithering fingering in Hadelich's encore, his own arrangement of Howdy Forrester's bluegrass fiddler *Wild Fiddler's Rag*.

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The concert ended on another light note with Hugo Alfven's skittering *Dance of the Shepherd Girl*: a sillier encore than I'd hoped, but after the orchestra's earlier exertions, so polished and shapely, with gorgeous playing across all sections, you couldn't blame Jarvi and the musicians for finally having some simple fun.

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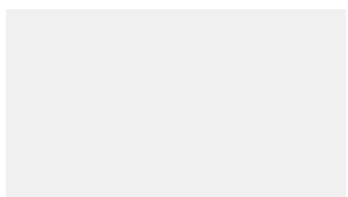


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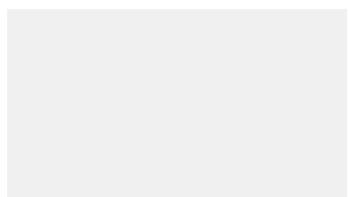


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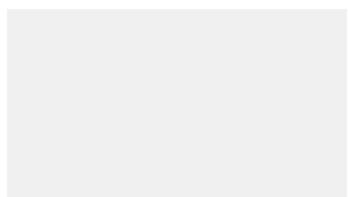
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