

MUSIC
BBC SSO: BRITTEN
AND DVORAK

CITY HALLS, GLASGOW

★★★★

A HUMBLE afternoon radio concert it may have been, but what a belter of a show the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra put on – driven, vivid and full of life. The orchestra's players were undoubtedly the stars of the show, but it was the astonishing young US conductor Joshua Weilerstein, making his debut with the BBC SSO, who galvanised them into their searing performances, leaping energetically on the platform yet balancing dramatic detail with a sure sense of structure. In his hands, melodies bloomed in exquisite shapes, and textures gleamed, rich yet transparent.

Most unexpected was the carefully titled *Movements for a Clarinet Concerto*, a piece assembled in 2007 by composer Colin Matthews from Britten's sketches for a clarinet concerto, which the older composer never

completed. It's doubtful that the piece comes close to what Britten would have written, but no matter – Matthews has devised a striking, memorable work, and this Scottish premiere from Finnish clarinetist Olli Leppäniemi was charismatic, colourful and confident.

The more familiar Britten *Simple Symphony*, which preceded it, can often seem naïve and child-like, but in Weilerstein's hands it became a profound symphonic statement, gripping and moving – tempos were unforgivingly brisk, and the gauchely titled *Sentimental Sarabande* can seldom have sounded more Mahlerian.

There was a delicious swagger to his opener: Osvaldo Golijov's *Last Round*, a tribute – sometimes brutal, sometimes poignant – to the tangos of his fellow Argentine, Astor Piazzolla. And there was a grand sweep to Weilerstein's Dvorák *Seventh Symphony*, which brought the afternoon to a blazing conclusion.

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