

# Reviews & Reports

Edinburgh Youth Orchestra Spring Concert Review

## Review of Usher Hall concert in Edinburgh's online guide

By Barnaby Miln - Posted on 11 April 2010

Venue: The Usher Hall

Company: Edinburgh Youth Orchestra

Production: Shostakovich, Festive Overture; Beethoven, Violin Concerto; Rimsky-Korsakov, Scheherazade.

Performers: Garry Walker (conductor), Daniel Bell (violin)

Running time: 140mins

Almost 120 players between the ages of 13 and 21 sat patiently on stage without a single fidget to be seen when on came the young conductor, Garry Walker, reaching his podium with a jaunty spring in his step, to conduct Shostakovich's short Festive Overture.

This concert was the culmination of a whole week's intense course held this year at St Thomas of Aquin's Roman Catholic High School in the centre of Edinburgh. Auditions are held every year and the brightest of Scotland's young musicians chosen to work under an eminent conductor and with a team of professional coaches.

Two grandmothers sitting near me spoke of their fourteen year old granddaughter's exhilaration at being selected and of the great time she had been having. A little tired, one of them said. But on stage with her violin at the Usher Hall that was quickly forgotten.

The father of two gifted musicians now too old for the orchestra described to me just how important the opportunity to be part of the Edinburgh Youth Orchestra had been to them both; they had gone on to greater musical heights. Parents, uncles and aunts, grandparent and others in the audience clearly all recognised that this was a very special and formative night for the youngsters.

The overture at the beginning, and Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade after the interval are both pieces that give the highlight, sometimes fleetingly, to many parts of the orchestra. Make a mess of it at your moment of glory and you really have let the side down. Nobody did. Other youngsters learn team playing on the football pitch.

The responsibility of the Orchestra's leader was highlighted too. No mere figurehead, Jessica Hall performed with style and complete confidence the solo parts of Scheherazade and well deserved the flowers the conductor passed on to her at the end. Her colleague on the front desk showed us most impressively how to get everybody tuned up at the start. Other orchestras can make a fool of themselves at this stage.

Without a doubt the star of the night was Daniel Bell, the soloist for Beethoven's Violin Concerto. This is a long and demanding piece for the soloist, accompanied by a smaller orchestra. The players not needed came and watched with the audience. Daniel Bell was born in 1976, grew up in Edinburgh and is a former member of the Orchestra. It can be proud of him, for his performance was enthralling, confident and artistic. The audience let it be known by their applause just how much he was appreciated.

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## Review in Dundee Courier of Perth Concert

When the Edinburgh Youth Orchestra are in town, you can be guaranteed one thing...a bright, vibrant and polished performance. What the players can't be guaranteed is a decent audience and on Monday night only a quarter-full Perth Concert Hall witnessed an excellent performance from an orchestra huge in both size and ability.

There is a risk of going overboard with the EYO, and why not? They tick all the boxes when it comes to ability, technical nous and musicianship with natural youthful exuberance making a pretty potent combination. Admittedly, there were one or two inaccuracies and some precarious moments but when you consider the age of the players and the music sat in front of them, total perfection is asking a bit too much. What they delivered was a passionate, earnest and skilled performance of three classical works of which you never tire of hearing.

Much should be said of the EYO/Garry Walker combination. Conductor Walker is a former cellist with the orchestra and there is an obvious mutual admiration here, a reciprocated appreciation of the other's talents. This makes life in the concert hall much easier to contend with and, thus, much more fruitful.

Shostakovich's Festive Overture must be one of THE great concert openers, a whirlwind ten minute orchestral fiesta which has a magnificent feel-good factor. Bold and brassy it may be, but if anything reflects the composer's joie de vivre it is this brilliant work, with orchestra displaying equal amounts of spirit and vitality.

Daniel Bell's interpretation of Beethoven's Violin Concerto took a while to sink in for me, but in the end I felt it was a triumphant one. In this he concentrated on the lyrical not the heroic, something this great work lends itself to more than the bravado showpiece equivalents of Tchaikovsky and Brahms. There was no "wow" factor here, but instead a deliberate but never under-stated interpretation of the work's beautiful melodic construction, with the speed dictated by Garry Walker at the outset establishing the sort of wistful mood that emanated throughout. It wasn't all calmness personified because there are plenty moments for Bell flex his virtuosic muscles and deliver the more challenging sections with style, particularly in the first movement cadenza.

The EYO were soundly behind him, reduced by half after the Shostakovich, and after a slightly tentative start proved the epitome in orchestral backing.

Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade is quite a test for any orchestra but proved the perfect vehicle for this young orchestra to display the whole spectrum of their talents. There was force...eight horns, four trumpets and five trombones made that patently obvious...but there were also beautiful moments of tranquility from the strings, and a particularly impressive contribution from an outstanding woodwind section. Dotted about the score are some extremely exposed and challenging solos from all sections of the orchestra and Walker was correct to give each individual due acknowledgment as each was performed with characteristic aplomb. One young lady who deserves a special mention is the orchestra's leader, Jessica Hall, whose interpretation and performance of the demanding part of Scheherazade herself was quite exquisite.

Behind this talented ensemble, some of whom are surely destined for an exciting future, are a group of coaches and mentors. The fact this orchestra plays to such a high standard is as much a testament to their expertise and encouragement as it is to the players' natural abilities.

Garry Fraser

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## Scotsman Review of Usher Hall Concert

Edinburgh Youth Orchestra  
Usher Hall, Edinburgh  
Three Stars

Shostakovich's Festive Overture provided a suitably vibrant opening to the Edinburgh Youth Orchestra's spring concert, showing off the magnificent orchestral sound these talented young musicians can produce. There was everything from glizty brass fanfares to swaggering strings in this jubilant piece commemorating Russia's 1917 October Revolution.

With standards in the EYO getting better all the time, it's not surprising that over the years many players have gone on to establish successful careers in the industry. EYO conductor and artistic director Garry Walker and violinist Daniel Bell are both former players and they teamed up again for Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D. This is one of the most challenging pieces in the repertoire so Walker set a safe but sure course with tempi tending towards the slow side, particularly in the first and last movements. While this tended to dampen much of Beethoven's natural exuberance, it did allow the honeyed tones of Bell's violin to sing out against a carefully calibrated orchestral backdrop. This was a fairly by-the-book reading from Bell, but his sparky cadenzas suggest that with a bit more confidence he could make something quite special out of this piece.

The tales of heroic deeds in 1001 Arabian Nights are beautifully captured in Rimsky-Korsakov's ravishing Scheherazade. Again, this was an ideal piece for the EYO with opportunities for solo instruments to shine and the orchestra to revel in a sumptuous and exotic soundworld.

Susan Nickalls