

Star cellist and Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra triumph

When the Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra's strings opened their concert on 19 June at St Saviour's Church with Beethoven's Egmont Overture I pinched myself to make sure I had not arrived unexpectedly in Vienna, so balanced and in-tune was the sound they made. Graham Jones, I mused conceitedly, had clearly brought them to this level specifically to do justice to an evening of some of my favourite music. As I came out of this odd reverie, I knew I could settle back in my pew and simply enjoy myself. And so I did, during Walton's music for the film Henry V, Sibelius's Karelia Suite, and Butterworth's thoroughly English Banks of Green Willow. It was only as the interval arrived that I realised that all these tuneful works had sad reminiscence of conflict. Beethoven composed Egmont during the Napoleonic Wars; Butterworth was killed by Germans on the Somme one hundred years ago; Henry V and the French had showered each other with arrows. Karelia was, I think, the scene of heavy fighting between the Russians and the Finns in the Second World War. Perhaps in selecting these pieces conductor Graham Jones was dropping us a hint about the in/out vote which we all had to make a few days after the concert.

Many in the audience had heard Jamal Aliyev when he won the annual ESO Young Musician Competition, and they were all anticipating something very special after the interval... They were not disappointed!

He chose to perform Dvořák's Cello Concerto, which is unusual in that the soloist is somehow an integral part of the orchestra, rather than a stand-alone performer. It is a work of inherent beauty, full of tunes, and unmistakably the work of the Czech composer of nine symphonies and the opera Rusalka. The three movements demand so much more than technique, so emotional is the music. And the orchestra, being an equal partner with the soloist, can carry no passengers.

In the event we all knew that we were hearing a great new talent, and, equally important, an orchestra that can rise to an occasion. In the long orchestral opening Graham Jones drew some lovely string sounds and, furthermore, the sighing music had a life which prepared us all for the entry of the soloist. There was a fine horn solo, by no means the only moment when Dvořák allowed individual members of the orchestra to become part of a truly deep human experience.

The second movement expresses Dvořák's sorrow at the illness of a beloved sister-in-law. Soloist and orchestra seemed to be sharing the composer's emotions. Then, in the final movement, the indomitable Czech spirit and the remembered sorrow moved through striking rhythms to a resolute conclusion. Very well done, Graham and the ESO. And tumultuous applause for the combination of huge talent with charming modesty in the person of Jamal Aliyev.