

Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra's Spring Concert is a Triumph over Unseasonable Weather

When the ESO chose Humperdinck, Mozart and Tchaikovsky for their spring concert at St Saviour's Church on Sunday 18 March they probably hoped that a balmy evening would pull in the crowds. Unfortunately, another Siberian wind and a gusty snowfall left a number of empty pews, though the Mayor and many musical stalwarts were present to see and hear one of the orchestra's finest performances.

Humperdinck's tuneful overture to his opera Hansel and Gretel showed the ESO's large body of strings in great form under Leader Lisa Wigmore; and Conductor Kenneth Roberts coaxed fine playing from every section of the orchestra. The echoing vault of the church is probably too resonant for every nuance to be heard but, nonetheless, we knew we were in for an engaging evening.

And the second work really showed every musician to be on their mettle. Kenneth Roberts set down his baton and, from the piano, gave sufficient guidance regarding tempo for the orchestra to follow his masterly interpretation of one of Mozart's finest works: the Piano Concerto No 21 in C. The slow middle movement hit the classical charts around 1967 when it caught the public imagination in the film *Elvira Madigan*, and its romantic beauty sat dreamily between two allegro movements, in which Kenneth played his own cadenzas. This was in every way a performance to cherish.

The second half was devoted to Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 5. It is a monumental work, demanding great accuracy and musical insight. The nostalgic horn solo in the second movement gives licence to many a famous conductor to 'wallow', dragging the melody ever slower. I was delighted to have a performance in which this lovely tune spoke for itself, setting the route for repeats and variations by other instruments. The finale can be seen as another whole symphony, with four different speed markings to navigate. It was so confidently played by every section that even the huge resonance could not dim Tchaikovsky's concept. Little surprise, therefore, that the applause was exceptionally loud with some of the audience standing as well to acknowledge a great performance. And several of the players were picked out for a round of applause to themselves.

We all went home feeling that the scything wind was coming straight from St Petersburg where, in 1888, the composer himself conducted the premiere.

We look forward to warmer weather and another inspirational evening at the ESO's summer concert on Saturday 16 June at 7pm in St Saviour's Church.

Robin Gregory