

## Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra's Summer Concert

Reviewed by Robin Gregory

St Saviour's Church was again full for Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra's latest performance on 14 June, and the tuneful evening was given an added sparkle by the presence not only of the Mayor but also of Gen Li, a brilliant young Chinese pianist, winner of many awards including the Orchestra's annual competition.

Conductor Graham Jones could hardly have chosen a more attractive programme: 'popular' but in no way trivial. He opened with Vaughan Williams's Wasps Overture. From the technically demanding opening to the soaring central melody it was clear that rehearsals had not been wasted. Everyone looked and sounded confident, and justifiably so.

Elgar's Chanson de Matin and Chanson de Nuit were originally conceived as pieces for solo violin and piano. An interesting article in the, as ever, excellent printed programme described how those French titles came about, and how Elgar came to orchestrate them. The two minor masterpieces were given just the right romantic interpretation by Graham's forces. Interestingly the audience was slow to applaud after the fade-away conclusion of Nuit which is why I feel they are musically more satisfying (when played together) if Night precedes Morning.

Then the big test! The first and third movements of Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No 2 zip along at breakneck speed, taking soloist and orchestra to the limit. Between, there is a slow Andante with one of those ravishing tunes the composer could summon up on demand. The applause said it all: a fine performance indeed by Gen Li, sensitive and dazzling where appropriate; and great orchestral sound that never lost its way for a second.

After the interval, Beethoven's rhythmical Symphony No 7 was equally well served. I suspect it's an aspect of the acoustic in St Saviour's that, just occasionally, the strings seemed overpowered by the brass, at least from my seat, but that fact could not diminish my enjoyment of a crisp, sensitive performance of this popular work. The tempi were exceptionally well judged: none of this racing away at top speed in the finale which seems to have become the norm with so many young turks wielding the baton.

This was another evening to treasure.

The ESO's autumn concert on Sunday 11 October will include Sibelius's Symphony No 2 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of his birth. There will also be a feature on some locally inspired music.