

Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra discovers a great talent

Eastbourne's own orchestra does far more than simply entertain. With their conductor Graham Jones in great form on Sunday 20 October, a large audience in St Saviour's Church was assured of some delicious music but, in addition, we were to discover that the ESO had again hit the jackpot with their choice of winner of their annual Young Soloist Competition. More of that anon.

A well-chosen programme opened with Mendelssohn's *Ruy Blas* Overture. The composer is said to have hurried through the task of composition in three days, and been so on edge at the time that he later forbade publication. In spite of all that, it's well worth an airing occasionally, and the ESO gave a rhythmical account which led me to hope that one day I may see Victor Hugo's play of the same name.

The four movements of Mozart's Jupiter Symphony No 41 (K551) received thoughtful treatment, bringing out especially the melodic invention and subtlety of the score. Graham and his well-balanced instrumentalists led us to the interval with smiles on our faces, despite the weather.

One work only was planned for the second half: Sibelius's Violin Concerto. It has long been a favourite of mine. I have four CD performances: by Heifetz, Oistrakh, Perlman and Ricci. All men, but some very distinguished ladies have also been recorded. Mullova recorded the work with Ozawa conducting the Boston Symphony; and Neveu with the Philharmonia under Susskind. How, I wondered, would today's soloist with the ESO tackle this demanding work? A whole page in the printed programme detailed the growing career which 18 year-old Lucilla Rose Mariotti is developing.

In the event, there is little I can add to the well-deserved applause which her superb account elicited. She was able to soar above the complex orchestral detail when it was demanded in the lengthy first movement, and her creamy tone in the second movement could become fiery as she reached the rhythmic excitement of the third.

She and Graham seemed to bring out the very best in the orchestra (led by Lisa Wigmore), and I was not alone in leaping to applaud when, we assumed, all was over. Clever girl: Lucilla Rose had a short extra piece (by Paganini) to thank us, or so it seemed. A great night out!

Eastbourne's orchestra celebrates 40 years next year. The season starts with their annual competition in the Birley Centre (first round 4 and 5 January; final 26 January) and continues with a performance of Haydn's Creation on 26 April in St Saviour's Church. More details on www.eso.org.uk or from 07780 993801.

Robin Gregory