



Christmas At The Movies - Halle Orchestra **at Bridgewater Hall**

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) December 2016

The last concert before Christmas day, and certainly one of the best concerts this Christmas season. The orchestra were resplendent in white dinner jackets for the men and black evening gowns for the ladies, and there was a definite air of decorum and professionalism. And let's face it, a Friday evening concert on the eve of Christmas Eve needs a certain *je ne sais quoi* to make it stand out a little.

This had everything; just enough Christmasification of the hall to make it seasonal without it being over-the-top and crass, and a world-class orchestra with a seasoned and brilliant conductor at the helm to bring some of our Christmas TV favourites to life.

We were of course. in the wonderful world of cinema music; but not just any cinema music, just those appertaining to this season of merriment and goodwill. In this regard, there were the traditional Christmas-themed films, along with those films which are perennial favourites and seem to appear over the festive season on our goggleboxes at some point.

We started with Goodwin's arrangement of possibly the most famous Christmas song ever, made famous by Bing Crosby and written for the Musical Film 'Holiday Inn', it was of course, White Christmas. maybe I was being ultra-receptive, but I have never heard this piece of music sound better!

The evening was interspersed with little snippets by the lovely Stephen Bell (Associate Conductor for the Halle, Pops) and the music flitted between the Christmas music and the film music from seasonal favourites. We heard music from James Bond, Mary Poppins, Harry Potter, and even Die Hard!, mixed with Disney classics such as 101 Dalmatians, The Aristocats, Cinderella and Dumbo; with Christmas-themed film music from Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas, The Polar Express, Babes In Toyland, Frozen, and finishing the concert superbly with the theme from Miracle on 34th Street.

My two personal favourites from the evening though were undoubtedly the hauntingly and simply beautiful Glasgow Love Theme from the film, Love Actually, and a fabulous arrangement by Townsend of Freddie Mercury's Queen hit, Somebody To Love [it is featured in the animated film, Happy Feet!].

The orchestra was certainly at its best this evening, and it is not often you see 7 percussionists on stage at the same time. We also saw some rather unusual orchestral instrument featured this evening too. Bass flutes, contra-bassoons and bass clarinet were all featured this evening, as well as a rhythm section and Paul Jones constantly jumping from piano, to celeste to keyboard and back again!

Such a wonderful concert and a lovely way to get us all in the mood for the Christmas weekend, as we leave the auditorium humming the tunes as we go. Maybe the weather put people off, but it was such a shame to see so many empty seats tonight!