



[A Classical Extravaganza](#)

[The Halle Orchestra](#) at Bridgewater Hall

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) October 2016

This was The Halle Orchestra's first concert in this year's season of POPS. A series of concerts of lighter music designed to attract those who may find sitting through a whole Beethoven symphony something of a punishment, or for those who may well be new to classical music and these concerts provide a lovely opening and insight into that world.

Entitled ***A Classical Extravaganza***, I thought perhaps that the music would have been more eclectic and indeed more 'extravagant' than it actually proved to be. Finding two items on the programme by the same composer was a surprise enough, but to also have three movements from one of his works when there is a whole world of music out there spanning several hundred years, was pushing it a little. Or maybe that was just me who thought that.

The concert was of course conducted by the very personable **Stephen Bell**. It is always a delight to watch him conduct, and his easy rapport with the audience as he gives us little snippets of information about the pieces is always welcome. The one thing that does irritate me slightly in a concert such as this where there are many miniature or novelty pieces lasting only a few minutes each, is why the members of the orchestra who are not playing in that particular piece need to leave the stage. Surely they can just sit silently and still for a few minutes before playing again? It is a little distracting and haphazard.

The music itself was of course wonderful. The Halle never disappoints. Although if I do have to be picky, then the French horns were a little out of sync on their chorded introduction to Fenby's '**Rossini On Ilkla Moor**', and I could hear the cymbals being placed on the ground after they were used in the opening piece [surely they could have been placed on a cushion or cymbal rack?]. But, yes, I am nit-picking, sorry. This is live entertainment not canned, and so it will obviously not be flawless; that's part of the beauty and appeal.

I did know all the pieces on offer in the concert; although I suspect a good few were hearing one or two for the first time. Dvorak's **Carnival Overture** started the concert off and it is always a good rousing and jolly opening. In the first half there were such gems as

Elgar's Chanson De Matin

, one of two pieces he wrote originally for solo violin and piano so that he could perform them himself, however, this was his orchestrated version of 1901; Fenby's 'Rossini On Ilkley Moor', a novelty piece by Yorkshire composer Eric Fenby who wrote a concert overture using the tune of 'On Ilkley Moor Bah't 'at' in the style of Rossini; and Johann Strauss' waltz

Tales From the Vienna Woods

, which interestingly has the longest introduction to the waltz of any of Strauss' hundred or so compositions. The original version also calls for a solo zither, however, Strauss also authorised a version for string quartet to play the solo zither part, and it was this version we heard this evening.

We also heard Pachelbel's Canon, which sounded very different from versions of this work I had previously heard. Here the repetitive bass theme was played with strict adherence to the actual note length, coming off almost staccato before playing the next. I assume this to be more authentic perhaps; however the bass continuo theme has always been played legato before, so that there was no conceivable gap between one note and the next. Interesting.

Finally in the first act was one of my all-time favourite pieces of music, and a classic example of a dissident wearing his heart on his sleeve; Dmitri Shostakovich's Romance from his film music to *The Gadfly*. The Halle Orchestra's leader, **Paul Barritt** taking the violin solo here and playing it beautifully.

After the interval and the spotlight was turned on one of America's, indeed the world's greatest contemporary cross-over composers, Leonard Bernstein. What a delightful start to the second half with his rather jocular and brash ***Overture to Candide***. Back to Elgar again and three movements from his

Variations On

An original Theme, Enigma

. Nimrod alone would have sufficed here surely, as with the next excerpt, Handel's

Music For The Royal Fireworks

; chose the most well known piece, in this case,

La Rejouissance

, and pass by the other two in favour of some other music from the vast and limitless music cupboard.

The penultimate piece was Faure's hauntingly beautiful ***Pavane***. Always a delight to hear this piece; so simple and yet so heart-wrenching. And then to finish we heard the theme to TV's The Lone Ranger - or to give its correct title, Rossini's overture to the opera William Tell. This was Rossini's last opera, and yet he still continued composing for 40 years, so one can only assume that he thought this work the pinnacle of his operatic mastery. It's a great piece of music and a lovely way to finish a concert devoted to 'pops'.

Manchester really is spoilt with such a wealth of music at our fingertips. Manchester is home to this quite rightly world renowned orchestra, and I always feel privileged and even proud to be able to enjoy their incredible musicianship in a live arena.

The Bridgewater Hall itself can look a little austere and unfriendly from the outside, but I urge everyone to be brave enough to enter. The staff are always extremely pleasant, helpful and welcoming; and the Hall itself hosts a whole plethora of events, ranging from Heavy Metal gigs, to Folk music festivals to indeed rather highbrow classical concerts. But do take a look at their website, you may be pleasantly surprised at what you find! Details of upcoming Halle concerts can be found at <http://www.halle.co.uk/whats-on/>, with The Bridgewater Hall's complete events listings at <http://www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk/whats-on/>.