



[The Halle Youth Orchestra Concert](#) at Bridgewater Hall

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) December 2016

The Halle Youth Orchestra is a concert orchestra of nearly 70 young musicians all aged between 13 and 19, and all come from within the boundary of Greater Manchester. There is some serious talent here, and I sincerely hope that all of these young students find work with their chosen instrument, maybe even with the Halle Orchestra itself - who knows.

Maybe it was the timing of the concert, but sadly, the auditorium was fairly empty. It seems that punters are willing to pay for Christmas entertainment at this time of year, but the more classical and traditional fayre has been forsaken. That is such a shame since these musicians need and deserve all the support and encouragement they can get. Why not move the date of this concert

either forward or back by just one month; maybe that would have an impact on ticket sales?

In tonight's concert there were three pieces on the programme. First, a piece written just for the strings, and for some reason - I have no idea why - the conductor chose to ask the violinists to stand for this. It did look rather odd. The music was by Edvard Grieg, and it was his well known and much loved Holberg Suite. Following this, it was the turn of the woodwind and brass instruments to shine, as they were given a piece which showcased them alone; Stravinsky's Symphonies For Wind Instruments. Stravinsky uses the word symphony here in its original meaning of 'sounding together'. It is a very difficult piece to both play and listen to; deliberately discordant and changing both key and time signatures as it progresses, there is little to latch on to, and yet it is nonetheless captivating.

After the interval and we heard Shostakovich's 6th Symphony. Perhaps the most lyrical and melodic of his symphonies, and also one of his more popular. Shostakovich was an incredibly passionate composer pouring out all of his torrid emotions into his music - the strong, strident, and very Russian opening to this work is a prime example. Set this all against the political background of his native land at the time of writing, and it is a real wonder there are any melodies left in his work. Melodies there are aplenty though, mostly taken from folk songs and patriotic songs, and then cleverly and uniquely intertwining them in his works in his own inimitable style. His symphonies, although none are overlong, are all very much epic in style. For musicians so young and inexperienced - both musically and in the worldly sense, playing Shostakovich is therefore a tall order, but they pulled it off here with great aplomb! The beautiful elongated pianissimo coda at the end of the first movement pitted against the raucous joviality of the second was superbly measured

The whole concert was under the direction of the enigmatic and passionate baton-waving of Jonathan Heyward, and I am looking forward to seeing a lot more from this exacting and precise new-conductor-on-the-block! He was certainly more than capable of bringing out the absolute

best from his young charges this evening, and both him and the orchestra were a sheer delight.