

Music Review: BBC SSO - Boulez at 90

Michael Tumelty
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BBC SSO, City Hall, Glasgow

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three stars

THREE-quarters of the BBC SSO's concert in the Hear and Now contemporary music series, given on Saturday on the wildest night of the year, was a triumph of new music making contact with its audience. The fourth quarter, paradoxically featuring the music of the God of modernity, Pierre Boulez, 90 this month, proved a relative dud, short in any definition of musicality.

Before that, conductor Matthias Pintscher championed other composers, with Serbian Marko Nikodijevic's *Little Flower, Little House*, based on Liszt's *La Lugubre Gondola*, mesmerising in its consistently-dark mood and its ceaselessly-lapping tidal effects.

German composer Manfred Trojahn's *Herbstmusik*, based on a forensic analysis of Sibelius's Fifth Symphony, re-imagined the physical and psychological scale of Sibelius's craggy masterpiece, though here the crags were granite-like, and the music's surging momentum transformed from the aspirational to something ominous.

The hit of the night, the *Hawk-eye Horn Concerto* by Slovenian Vito Zuraj, is an amazing piece which received a staggeringly-characterised performance by soloist Saar Berger, giving a real bird's-eye view of the world, with the rushing wind in your face and the swoop from a great height onto a luckless prey, with all the rude gulping and devouring sounds, and the inevitable hilarious effects on the digestive system.

All characterful stuff. Then it fell apart in Boulez's *...explosante fixe...* with its torrential constellations of notes, all dazzling, high-speed and glittering music, with computer-electronics. But the surface brilliance seemed just that, with little sign of musical depth or character until the final 10 minutes, when it began to subside, and expressivity, via the orchestra and the three flute soloists, dared to creep in the door.