

## February 2010 – Concert Review

There's nothing quite like a symphony orchestra to warm the cockles on a chill damp evening. Some 800 music-lovers seemed to share that view on Saturday, no doubt lured by the prospect of Grieg's Piano Concerto and Tchaikovsky's Fifth.

But in any case Simon Wright has whipped the Guildhall Orchestra into tremendous shape in recent years, good enough to partner the finest soloists. For Sarah Beth Briggs delivered the solo role in the Grieg in breathtaking style.

It was not just that the piano's quadruple octaves which spice the work so liberally were impeccably crisp and totally accurate; there was a wealth of nuance in her approach which ran right through the work, not merely in the more obviously romantic pages of the slow movement.

In all this she had a sure-footed ally in Wright: their rapport was close and intense. By any standards this was a sensational performance. Briggs is at the peak of her powers.

In her wake, the Tchaikovsky might have been an anticlimax. Some of the woodwind solos were at first under-coloured, though not the bassoonist's, nor Janus Wadsworth's vital horn in the Andante. But the orchestra's feel for the ebb and flow of the drama grew ever more intense. Wright seemed to want a more vibrant attack from his cellos in the finale, but when its main theme returned he achieved a thrilling buoyancy throughout the strings. MacCunn's The Land of the Mountain and the Flood had provided a stirring curtain-raiser.

*Martin Dreyer*  
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