

PCM8: Benedetti Elschenbroich Grynyuk Trio – Brahms's Opus 8 & Arlene Sierra's Butterflies Remember a Mountain

Nick Breckenfield | September 7, 2015

With Yo-Yo Ma's Bach still ringing majestically in my ears from Saturday night, I did wonder how I'd take to another cellist so soon, especially as the cello takes the lead in the opening movement of Brahms's B-major Piano Trio. I needn't have worried with Leonard Elschenbroich and his Matteo Goffriller 'Leonard Rose' instrument dating from 1693. His is a refined and sweet tone, ideally suited to Brahms's expansive romanticism, where Allegro is never pushed too fast.

Elschenbroich was matched with partners of seven years standing, Nicola Benedetti and Alexei Grynyuk. Curiously the programme announced that the Trio was making its Proms debut, but reference to the Proms Archive confirms a previous appearance Cadogan Hall, on 13 August 2012. Then the musicians played Brahms's Opus 101 Piano Trio; this afternoon in 2015 they moved both two years later (to 1889, when Brahms made his wholesale revision of Opus 8) and, in essence, some thirty years earlier to 1853/4 when – just into his 20s – Brahms originally conceived the work.

We know what a febrile burst of energy Brahms was at that early age: bursting in on Robert and Clara Schumann and thereby announcing himself to the world. This youthful trio of musicians can match such ardent brio, but also has the maturity of Brahms's second thoughts. They meld together into a cohesive whole, anchored by Grynyuk's contained but expressive piano-playing (his facial expressions imply that he's very much living the work), while Benedetti's Stradivarius (from 1717) is a fine match for Elschenbroich's cello. And if this Piano Trio was not enough Brahms, at the end of the recital – for an encore – we were treated to the Andante from the Opus 101 Trio; an exquisite farewell not only to the concert, but also this year's Proms Chamber Music lunchtime recitals. Before going live on Radio 3, presenter Petroc Trelawny had referenced Edward Blakeman's 20 years planning these concerts, first at the V & A Lecture Hall and – for the last decade – at Cadogan. One of the most far-reaching new initiatives in the Proms, it has allowed a focus on chamber and instrumental repertoire that has still been relatively underexplored by the Proms.

Otherwise it was Arlene Sierra's intriguingly entitled *Butterflies Remember a Mountain* (2013) – taken from a scientific headline about migrating Monarch butterflies still diverting their route over Lake Superior because millennia ago their way was blocked by a mountain. Sierra said she liked the haiku-like brevity of the headline and proceeded to compose – at Elschenbroich's request – a short three-movement work, where the movements follow the title exactly: *Butterflies*; *Remember*; *A Mountain*.

From the whispering and whirring of the opening, over Ravel-like piano splashes (Sierra acknowledged the influence of this composer) before the violin takes flight, to the more minimalist repetitions of the finale, via the more thoughtful and nostalgic second movement – low cello pitched against high violin – this is a most involving work. This Prom epitomised the scope of the Proms in upholding the musical traditions of the past alongside the presentation of the new.

Gig review: Nicola Benedetti, Perth Concert Hall

Ken Walton | September 19, 2015

Nicola Benedetti: Italy And The Four Seasons Tour, Perth Concert Hall

Rating: ***

NICOLA Benedetti's latest round-Britain tour – Italy & The Four Seasons – opened on Thursday in Perth. If the capacity audience were after quantity, they got it in spades – wall-to-wall Vivaldi in an extensive first half, and a pairing of Mark-Anthony Turnage's specially written Duetti d'amore and Tchaikovsky's Souvenir de Florence to round off a mammoth three-hour concert.

That's not to question the quality, which was plentiful from Benedetti, her fellow front-liner Leonard Elschenbroich (cellist and boyfriend), and their top-level accompanying ensemble. Especially so in the second half, where a string sextet, led by Benedetti, found in Tchaikovsky's ravishing score an abundance of colour and expressive warmth; while she and Elschenbroich elicited a natural complicity in Turnage's five-piece duo suite, which explores, with imaginative ranges in character, and through that familiar Turnage co-existence of mischief and nostalgia, the many sides of the typical human relationship.

Benedetti's Four Seasons interpretations were nonetheless intriguing: teasingly wistful one minute, electrifying and explosive the next – a personal spin on an old Venetian favourite. It will bed in, I'm sure, as the 11-concert tour progresses.



Review: Nicola Benedetti at Aberdeen Music Hall

DailyRecord.co.uk | September 22, 2015

Nicola Benedetti, one of the world's most beloved classical violinists, returned to the Music Hall with a dynamic programme of music inspired by the spirit of Italy.

Nicola Benedetti is an artist always giving back to her audiences and gifting them with musical expressions of her life as one of the most sought after classical musicians of her generation, amazingly yet to reach her peak, *writes Catriona Mackenzie*. Her latest UK tour of the UK cities and Dublin consists of a programme inspired by her own Italian heritage and the 'spirit of Italy.'

Describing the evening as spirited would be an understatement. Benedetti herself said when introducing the concert “we have a lot of notes to get through this evening,” and quickly set about gathering musicians for the opening number; Antonio Vivaldi’s Violin Concerto in D, Il Grosso Mogul.

As an opener, the concerto worked to ease the audience into Vivaldi’s style and acquaint them with the storm of music to come in The Four Seasons. It also introduced the other ensemble musicians playing with Benedetti to the stage. Epic might not be a word often used to describe this piece, but the tenacious complexity within it was evident whilst watching and listening to Benedetti guide her group through each movement. The performance, although traditional, is youthfully energetic and races ahead of other contemporary interpretations, particularly in the instantly recognisable Summer presto. Benedetti pushes each phrase to the limit, almost digging into her violin at times to draw out as much sound as possible, despite notes often lasting fractions of a second. Despite her virtuosic playing and exceptional showmanship, some of her most captivating moments are the stillest, such as the Adagio Molto of Autumn- which was spellbinding and over too soon.

After accomplishing such feats in the first part of the evening, Benedetti returned with arguably her closest collaborator, her partner Leonard Elschenbroich, to perform a specially written duet for violin and cello; Mark-Anthony Turnage’s Duetti d’amore. The work had its premier at the start of this tour only days ago in Perth Concert hall.

The very modern working on two traditional instruments makes for interesting listening, especially when placed between works from baroque and late romantic composers. Both Benedetti and Elschenbroich play with dramatic flare through a piece which seems to encapsulate every time of lovers’ quarrel and resolution.

Tchaikovsky’s sextet set Souvenir de Florence brought an homage to old Italy back into the programme before the evening’s end. The work itself of course does not sound particularly Italian, but the inspiration of Florence was key to its making. The minimal six musicians on stage each brought an emotive style of play that suited the storytelling nature of the piece. In any other concert, Souvenir de Florence may have been enough to be a headline performance piece, but on this occasion it served as an enriching closing number, but one behind a marathon first part of the evening.

Benedetti said at the beginning of her performance that she does not take for granted occasions where so many people turn out for classical music concerts. If her latest offering is anything to go by, it is clear she will have plenty of classical programmes to plan for years to come.



Perth Concert Hall's 10th anniversary celebration weekends are massive success

DailyRecord.co.uk | September 23, 2015

To mark ten years of Horsecross and Perth Concert Hall Nicola Benedetti started her 11-concert tour of Great Britain and Ireland by saying what a particular pleasure it was for her to be back in Perth again and to have Perth as launch pad ... writes Ian Stuart-Hunter.

The concert of Nicola Benedetti and her 11 hand-picked virtuoso musicians began with Vivaldi's Violin Concerto Il Grosso Mogul.

A longer, late concerto with more convoluted solo writing, especially in the slow movement, where Benedetti's smoky tone and her free sounding rhapsodizing contrasted with just the continuo group.

In Vivaldi's famous Four Seasons Benedetti followed an individual line making it a real live concert.

The dance finale of Spring was a delight. Summer had beautifully veiled sound, before the fabulous vigour of the breaking of the real storm. Autumn made the most of solo/ripieno contrasts, vivid and exciting with effective ornamentation. The slow movement had the most extensive elaboration for archlute and harpsichord. Its third movement had spirit and compelling virtuosity. Winter was propelled with exciting, pin sharp articulation, transforming with Benedetti adding an Eingang to the warmth of the serenade, exemplary long bow strokes achieving tone without loudness.

As a bonus the girls of Kilgraston School joined in for a Vivaldi Concerto with lively playing, even the violas having a chance to shine. The school-girl leader, unnamed, for the first movement was spectacularly good.

The five Duetti d'amore of Mark-Anthony Turnage received their world première, with the composer himself in the hall to receive the enthusiastic applause of the packed audience. Written for Benedetti and cellist Leonard Elchenbroich, who charmingly introduced the piece, it took the meeting and growing acquaintance of the two as its background, giving varied phases to an on-going friendship.

The exciting whirl of Tchaikovsky's Souvenir de Florence gave a virtuoso and emotional end to the concert. Energy and lyricism marked the first movement. The second had a violin/cello duet of the warmest affection, the contrasting ghostly scrubbing of its central section an exciting sound. Suddenly in the Allegretto we were back in Russia for the viola's melancholy song, opposed in the giddy, fast sound of the Trio. From a soft start the Finale whirls through sonorous themes and even a fugato to a magnificent coda. A wow to end the concert.



Nicola Benedetti and friends play Chamber Music, Perth Concert Hall

Michael Tumelty | October 25, 2015

FOR the final major concert in her weekend residency at Perth Concert Hall on Saturday night, it might have been perceived that Nicola Benedetti wheeled out the big guns, re-joining her musical partners, cellist Leonard Elschenbroich and pianist Alexei Grynyuk, adding into the mix the fabulous and keenly-intelligent viola player Scott Dickinson, formerly of the Leopold Trio, now principal viola player with the BBC SSO, and letting fly with a couple of the biggest blockbuster chamber music masterpieces in the book.

Well, it was an enthralling and magnetic concert experience, but it wasn't quite as obvious as the end of the last sentence might suggest. For starters, Benedetti began on her own, with Alexei Grynyuk accompanying, in a little two-movement Sonata in a minor key by Mozart, K 304, where much of the music seemed to be characterised by stealth, restraint and understatement. This, I considered, could be a risky start: it was being followed by Brahms' B Major Piano Trio, one of the richest, most golden-melodied pieces in Romantic chamber music: I still swoon to the legendary Stern-Istomin-Rose recording, which is ancient but will live forever in its big, almost wide-screen unfolding of Brahms' glorious music.

The Benedetti group's version of the Trio was almost electrifyingly different. It was infinitely more intimate, which instantly collapsed the broad horizons, drawing the listener in, and creating that magical sense that the composer is speaking just to you. Despite the sheer variety of music throughout the piece, that, to me, was its message. It was captured again and again in the great slow movement, where there was a wondrous stillness, and just at the opening of the finale, where it seemed that the music didn't want to speak for fear of breaking the spell.

And then, with Scott Dickinson having joined the group, they did it all over again with Brahms' Second Piano Quartet, his longest work of the chamber music species. I don't know how anyone else in the audience might have perceived this performance, which was crystal-clear, but I was sat there, utterly rapt, listening to these wizards, these spell-binding musical narrators, weaving their intoxicating tales in abstract musical terms. Abstract, yes, but with precision-tooled accuracy in emotional terms. What a weekend.