

## Proms 45 and 46

BBCSO/Oramo;

### Gurrelieder

Royal Albert Hall

★★★★☆

A meniscus of sound as large as the Albert Hall, Schoenberg's symphonic music drama *Gurrelieder* threatens constantly to burst or seep or sag or stall. The opulence of the score is thrilling, baffling, occasionally numbing. Sharp points of starlight from a choir of eight flutes quicken a sequence of opiate waltzes: love music for Waldemar and Tove, whose ecstasy is described in the brush of cymbals, glissandi harps, dewy glockenspiel and sinuous oboe.

Simon Rattle's performance with the London Symphony Orchestra, the LSO Chorus, CBSO Chorus and Orfeo Català (Prom 46) kept the surface tension intact from the first sublime trumpet solo to the dazzling sunburst of the final chorus. If the tutti sound was spectacular, so too was the discipline in the secretive gasp of divisi cellos that introduce the Wood-Dove's narration of Tove's death, the harrowed skirl of horns and woodwind at Waldemar's grief, the feral song of the Peasant, the helter-skelter clarinets that accompany Klaus the Fool, the ghoulish whistle of the Speaker's music.

Although the vast male choir were tested by Schoenberg's extreme tessitura, the soloists sounded supremely confident. Simon O'Neill's Waldemar was laser-bright; Eva-Maria Westbroek's Tove supple, radiant and generous; Karen Cargill's Wood-Dove a steady gleam of beauty and sorrow; Christopher Purves and Peter Hoare's Peasant and Fool brilliantly animated; Thomas Quasthoff's Speaker menacing and playful with the text.

There was more unguarded beauty in Elizabeth Watts and Elisabeth Kulman's singing of the fourth and fifth movements of Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus and the Bach Choir under Sakari Oramo

(Prom 45). The most intimate moments were the most arresting, with exquisite solos from the trumpeter Alan Thomas, cor anglais player Alison Teale, bassoonist Julie Price and guest leader Andrej Power, and votive off-stage brass. If the pizzicato was a little unruly and the portamenti slightly tentative, the energy was keen and Oramo's tempos were persuasive.

**Anna Picard**