

reviews, news & interviews

Prom 44: Finley, LSO & Chorus, Orfeo Català, Rattle review - lurid inter-war triptych

Less could sometimes have been more in blockbusters by Varèse and Walton

by [David Nice](#) | Wednesday, 21 August 2019

Share |



Monkey business with the monstrous: Simon Rattle conducting the LSO

All images BBC/Chris Christodoulou

So the [Proms](#) ignored the Berlioz anniversary challenge to perform his Requiem and serve up four brass bands at the points of the Albert Hall compass. Yet at least last night in works of the 1920s and 1930s we got one offstage in the crazed baggy-monster original version of Varèse's *Amérique* and two in blazing antiphons on the platform, fanfaring both luxury and the celebrants of its overthrow in Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*. With [Simon Rattle](#) in command of vast forces, it was mostly loud and brilliant, but it could have been even more focused in its ferocity.

With two London orchestras showing off in coruscating repertoire three days apart at the Proms – the London Philharmonic under Jurowski on Saturday, the London Symphony Orchestra now in Rattle's charge last night – some comparisons were inevitable. Jurowski, highlighting Russian spectaculars from the previous two decades, kept it all sharp and shining throughout. Rattle, admittedly handling much more elaborate and modernistic material, with Stravinsky as the missing link between the two concerts, didn't always seem in total command of rhythm and propulsive movement.



“ Koechlin put younger Frenchman Varèse to shame for having something to say throughout, even if his simians ape different styles ”

rating

related articles

Total Immersion: Edgard Varèse, Barbican

Prom 41: Ghindin, LPO, Jurowski review - perfect sound in a Russian spectacular

Prom 46 review: Gurrelieder, LSO, Rattle - gorgeous colours, halting movement in

Subscribe to theartsdesk.com

Thank you for continuing to read our work on theartsdesk.com. For unlimited access to every article in its entirety, including our archive of more than 10,000 pieces we're asking for £3.95 per month or £30 per year. We feel that's a very good deal, and hope you do too.

To take an annual subscription now [simply click here](#)

And if you're looking for that extra gift for a friend or family member, why not treat them to a theartsdesk.com gift subscription?

more classical music



Manchester International Piano Competition
Chetham's review - stars in the making
Gifted young soloists show their worth in concert performances



Prom 47: Schönheit, Leipzig Gewandhaus
Nelsons review - Bruckner doesn't quite take flight
Ravishing sounds from thoroughbred Germans, undermined by sluggish tempos



Classical CDs Weekly: Bach, Christophers
Mr McFall's Chamber
Baroque keyboard suites and Norwegian brass virtuosos. Plus penguins and a musical saw.



Admittedly *Amériques* Mark One seems to lumber from one thrash to another; Charles Koechlin's *Les bandar-log*, his anthropomorphic 1939 scherzo taking Kipling's monkey troupe in *The Jungle Book* as its subject, put younger Frenchman Varèse to shame for having something to say throughout, even if his simians ape different styles between steamy-jungle bookends (wonderfully evocative from a team which knows *The Rite of Spring* and its heady Part Two prelude inside out). Varèse surely goes wrong in upturning the advice of Lewis Carroll's Duchess to "take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves"; the sounds, from naughty crow call, siren and wind machines to raucous brass fanfares, are fascinating but repetitious. A more whiplash approach might have been difficult given such gargantuan forces in such a venue, but it's possible, and it wasn't always felt last night.

If there was any fault about this immaculately together *Belshazzar's Feast*, it lay in the two-edged sword of vast vocal forces (the London Symphony Chorus, Orfeo Català senior and youth choirs from Barcelona, **pictured above** with Rattle and the LSO). The blazing chords of judgment brought supreme shock and awe, but when Walton wants angular, jazz-inspired drive, a choir half this size might have served the purpose better. The same ambivalence pertains to the venue: spacious for the broadest climaxes, taking away the edge of the syncopations and the roller-coaster rides around the great march.



No quibbles, though, about Gerald Finley's operatic narration (the bass-baritone **pictured above**), reaching its stylistic high water-mark in the punchline about Babylon's merchandise – "slaves, and the souls of men" – though still appropriately creepy, with perfect orchestral colouring, for the writing on the wall (the choral "slain" was spine-tingling, as it must be). The main thing is that we left in stunned admiration at the extremes to which Walton took the oratorio form. There may be deeper masterpieces in the choral/orchestral repertoire, but none more visceral.

- [Listen to this concert for the next month on the BBC iPlayer](#)
- [Read more classical reviews on theartsdesk](#)

Add comment

[Post a comment](#)

Schoenberg's monsterpiece

Edinburgh Festival 2018 review: Zimerman, LSO, Rattle - fizzing chemistry

Kozhukhin, LSO, Rattle, Barbican

explore topics

Classical music
LSO
Royal Albert Hall

Reviews
France
Proms

share this article

Share |



Edinburgh International Festival 2019: Bach's Multiple Concertos/ Manon Lesca reviews - dancing harpsichords, perfect Puccini

A day of pleasure and pain crowned by Sonda Radvanovsky and Donald Runnicles



Prom 46: Kanneh-Mason, CBSO, Gražiny Tyla review - brilliant programme, brilliant playing

Blend of familiar Elgar with undervalued Weinbe shows the Proms at its best



Prom 44: Finley, LSO & Chorus, Orfeo Català, Rattle review - lurid inter-war triptych

Less could sometimes have been more in blockbusters by Varèse and Walton



Prom 43: Haefliger, BBCSO & Chorus, Oramo review – the frisson of the new
Two exciting premieres and a valuable old chest in an uplifting evening



Prom 41: Ghindin, LPO, Jurowski review perfect sound in a Russian spectacular
An unwieldy early piano concerto is the curious pachyderm in a rainbow parade



Edinburgh International Festival 2019: MacMillan birthday concerts - searing wo premiere

Triumphant new choral symphony for our rudder times



theartsdesk at Bard Summerscape Festival 2019: unknown treasures and crosscurrent galore

'Korngold and His World' explores a heady confluence of old and new



Prom 40: Hough, OAE, Fischer review - pretty royal things

Queen Victoria's piano and Prince Albert's amat songs give variable pleasure



Classical CDs Weekly: Gounod, James MacMillan, Johannes Brahms
Frothy French symphonies, Scottish choral mus and trio sonatas from London and Paris

newsletter

Get a weekly digest of our critical highlights in your inbox each Thursday!

Simply enter your email address in the box below

[Sign up for our newsletter](#)

[View previous newsletters](#)

[Like 524](#)

[Share](#)

Follow @theartsdesk