

Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra "came in like a lamb and went out like a lion"

By William Ruff



The entrance to the Royal Concert Hall

The first Nottingham Classics orchestral concert of the season came in like a lamb and went out like a lion: Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony began and Respighi's epic soundscape of marching Roman legions ended a high-energy programme.

Conductor Stéphane Denève was also a force of nature, bursting onto the podium to deliver an infectious enthusiastic introduction, starting with unstinting praise (delivered in a French accent to die for) of the Royal Concert Hall's glorious acoustics.

Clearly inspired by the Hall's warm, detailed sound, Denève moulded a performance (<http://www.nottinghampost.com/music-news>) of the Pastoral Symphony that was strong both in atmosphere and colour. Dynamics were subtly shaded, tempi carefully judged. The transitions between peasant merrymaking, storm and shepherds' hymn were beautifully handled as tension was tightened, relaxed and allowed to blossom into sublime thanksgiving. There was clear empathy between the Brussels Philharmonic and their conductor, especially apparent in the lovely wind playing.

Read more: Go Outdoors to open its first superstore in Nottingham
(<http://www.nottinghampost.com/go-outdoors-to-sell-every-outdoor-product-imaginable-at-its-first-superstore-in-nottingham/story-29758647-detail/story.html>)

Usually audiences are nervous about new works, but many in the RCH (<http://www.nottinghampost.com/royal-concert-hall>) on Wednesday will want to explore further the music of French composer Guillaume Connesson. His *Flammenschrift* is an irresistibly rhythmic homage to German music in general and to Beethoven in particular: the sort of music that tries to pull you out of your seat to dance in the aisles. His other piece, *E chiaro nelle valle...*, celebrates the beauty of the Italian landscape and positively glows with sumptuous orchestral colour.

After this Respighi's *Pines of Rome* seemed the inevitable conclusion to this nature-inspired programme. Again Denève and his orchestra created a wide, deep palette of tonal colours and ranged through strongly contrasted moods. Children's games gave way to sombre thoughts of Roman catacombs; nightingales (courtesy of a splendid 1920s gramophone) led to the over-the-top, Technicolor conclusion, trumpets sounding from all directions. Many in the audience stood and cheered. And well they might.