

RPO/ Ahronovich

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ENGLISH ORCHESTRAS aren't used to coping with conductors like Yuri Ahronovitch. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Festival Hall seemed to have moments of skepticism, but worked so hard for him that the net result was a concert which will be remembered for a long time by those who attended. Flamboyant in his gestures inclined to hiss or sing out of tune very audibly, Ahronovitch tested his players' concentration to the utmost. He indulged unexpected changes of tempo-often going counter to what was in the score-demanded breathtaking pianissimos and stentorian fortissimos, throughout keeping the musical tension at a high point. I can well understand the controversy that raged over him when he conducted at Covent Garden last year. Invariably, here to my mind, the musical effect was convincing.

Already in the accompaniment provided for Tamas Vasary in Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto, I felt I was listening almost to a different orchestra from the one I heard in this same hall two nights earlier. The RPO strings were suddenly richer and moved together with sonorous power and precision the wind played as individuals, producing a curious contrast between the sensitive solos and uneven blend in tuttis. The first two movements of the concerto were superbly executed, and it was a shame that discipline lapsed somewhat in the finale.

Vasary meanwhile, played with beautifully timed rubrato delivery, realizing the delicate melancholy moods of the piece to perfection. The spirit of Chopin seemed to lurk in the background of this interpretation, whose façade was classical, but transparent enough to reveal an essentially introverted character.

Ahronovitch's reading of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony after the interval was nothing short of unique. Not often does a performance delineate the full scale and stature of this work, which is an eloquent and outstanding musical utterance needing none of those apologies that are often made for Bruckner's Symphonic idiosyncrasies. It was a very theatrical performance, but in the best sense, linking the music for the listener with the Wagnerian stage-music which had meant so much to the composer. Again, orchestral details went by the board, but the pacing of individual sections and general pulse were attained with unerring skill. It held the audience from first to last.