

# Ahronovitch

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The London Symphony Orchestra's Russian programme last night, also broadcast live on Radio 3, was conducted by Yuri Ahronovitch- the chief conductor until 1972 of the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra, now with the Gurzenich in Cologne' who made a sensational Covent Garden debut in Boris last year.

It was a long and splendid evening. Ahronovitch's incisive rhythmic cut and thrust, clear graphic gesture, and powerful control of detail coaxed and commanded from the LOS some of the most vivid and exciting orchestral playing that the Festival Hall has heard for many months. How good above all it was to hear a conductor who is not content merely to ride along on the virtuosity and unruffled expertise of a great orchestra- but who can lead it, shape it, gather it, together in unanimous focus within the individual frame and momentum he provides!

The programme began and ended with Tchaikovsky- an invigoratingly unsentimental reading of the Sleeping Beauty Prologue, quick and bright, dancing with colour; and a performance, worked in the finest detail but massively structured of the *Manferd* Symphony. Between whiles, Maurizio Pollini was the soloist in an account of Prokofiev's third piano concerto so absorbing, so entirely satisfying on its own terms, as to make critical comment superfluous.

I missed a degree of lyrical tenderness, of broad sensuous sweep in the first movement; but in a performance of such wholeness and conviction the reservation was small and easy to forget. Difficult to say which the more impressive: Pollini's own steely hammer-octaves land more impressive still; his hammer semiquavers, *fortissimo*, powerful, diamond-cut, or the brilliance and temper of the orchestral playing, not a measure's ensemble out of true. Ahronovitch's brisk tempi- once or twice for my taste too brisk- at least successfully sharpened any hint of saccharin in the finale's marvelous, immensely soppy tune.

The introduction to *Manferd*, *lento lugubre*, was broad and grand, shot through with the darkest colours; the andante of the first movement, anti-climatic in any lesser hands than the best, was miraculously shaped and shaded- shades, without exaggeration, of Toscanini. Faultless instrumental conversation in the vivace second movement was a joy to hear –every line crisp and clean. A wild and fantastic finale was superbly delivered: wild, fierce and free.