

Live reviews: Adelaide Symphony Orchestra

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This concert was the sixth in the 2009 ASO Master Series and featured guest conductor Marko Letonja, on loan from Orchestra Victoria where he is this year's principal guest conductor. Letonja was a commanding presence on the dais but displayed little passion as he lead the orchestra through this most romantic of programs.

The opening selection was Zoltan Kodaly's wonderful "Dances of Galanta", a beautiful piece written for the 80th anniversary of the Budapest Philharmonic in 1933. Its gypsy roots are clear throughout the "Dances", whether feverishly expressing the joy of love or mournfully reflecting on the anguish love so often brings. The pizzicato work was particularly well articulated and the clarinet took a clear leading role in setting the mood and developing the theme. After a few passages lacking just a little precision, the orchestra came together magnificently for the fulsome climax.

Edvard Grieg followed the Kodaly with his early "Piano Concerto in A Minor Opus 16". Like Kodaly, Grieg echoes traditional folk music throughout his piano concerto. For this performance, guest pianist Piers Lane (pictured) played the dominant keyboard line. Lane is internationally acclaimed and was last seen in Adelaide at the Town Hall for Musica Viva.

Once again wearing his trademark "loud" socks, and with his hair untamed, Lane looked the part of the eccentric creative, but his pianism is so exquisite that he really doesn't need these artistic accoutrements. Lane's playing perfectly suited the romantic notions of Grieg, and the Chopin he played as an encore. His delicate touch coaxed the keyboard to reach its full potential which he then celebrated with an easy confidence.

After the interval, the program concluded with excerpts from Sergei Prokofiev's delightful "Romeo & Juliet Suites 1 and 2". Originally composed as a ballet for the Kirov Theatre, this work was later commissioned by the Bolshoi, who refused to dance it because Prokofiev had given it a happy ending – the lovers didn't die as Shakespeare had intended. After "quite a fuss a the time" Prokofiev rewrote the ballet score as the Bard would have wished.

This selection of eight pieces from the combined first and second suites offered a sweeping summation of the variations, both musically and emotionally, of the full work. The ASO rose to the challenge of these "highlights", with the percussion section in particular adding weight to the performance. I would have happily listened to a few more of the 50-plus movements in the full ballet score. _ July 17-18, Festival Theatre

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