

York Guildhall Orchestra
York Barbican, 18th May 2019

FOR the last concert of their season, York Guildhall Orchestra assembled an enormous ensemble for two orchestral warhorses.

During Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries the brass enjoyed themselves; the main theme's final return with bass tuba was particularly invigorating. Although one might have wished for matching fearlessness – or at least more volume – from the strings, they did provide the requisite swirl to go with the bluster.

Stravinsky's Rite Of Spring, right from Isabel Dowell's classy opening bassoon solo, was shot through with instrumental brilliance. Spring Rounds had tonal heft; The Procession Of The Sage was formidably cacophonous; the horns whooped strikingly at the end of Dance Of The Earth; Glorification Of The Chosen One was appropriately euphoric, and Sacrificial Dance suitably fervid. The score's rhythmic irregularities held no terrors: with clear and unflurried direction from conductor Simon Wright, the orchestra negotiated the potential pitfalls with sure-footed teamwork. A remarkable, and thrilling, achievement.

Between these two seminal pieces, lighter fare was provided by Ian Bousfield, erstwhile principal trombone of the LSO and Vienna Philharmonic, and York born and bred. Launy Grøndahl's Trombone Concerto was pleasantly showy, with a lovely, well-crafted—if not particularly memorable—slow movement. Arrangements of two numbers from Korngold's opera Die Tote Stadt were emotionally done. The orchestra here, as elsewhere, provided sensitive support, Wright keeping tight control of Korngold's carefully composed rhythmic freedom. With Arthur Pryor's outrageously virtuosic variations on The Blue Bells Of Scotland, Bousfield brought the house down!

Robert Gammon
20th February 2019