

York Guildhall Orchestra
York Barbican, 9th February 2019

SATURDAY'S concert began with Humperdinck's Prelude to *Hänsel & Gretel*. This was very enjoyable – a warm, glowing, hymn-like opening followed by music which danced with joy.

Emily Lawler's Elemental Soundscapes proved to be a highly original tone-poem. In *Water*, an incoming tide moved from the back of the orchestra to the front, while under the surface a whale sang, and beautifully too. In *Fire*, there was again an orchestral realisation of an elemental event: spark, flame, fire and death.

There was a strong sense of symmetry in the opening *Air*. The air blowing across the orchestra strongly echoed the opening musical waves. There were eerie but beautiful solo viola, violin and flute commentaries. This was an ambitious, fascinating work and very well performed too. All that was missing was the Earth!

Sibelius's *Symphony No.6* is, of course, a masterpiece: the invention, musical intelligence and thematic/melodic originality are a wonder. The Guildhall's enjoyable performance had good balance, tight control, persuasive orchestral playing, but I wasn't totally convinced. It was not always as rhythmically tight as it might have been: a bit vague, I know, but I was absorbed in the sheer wonder of the music itself. Anyhow, I suspect that it was a rehearsal short of a very fine performance.

However, the evening belonged to violinist Tasmin Little who gave a flawless, inspirational, performance of Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy*. There are four movements each based on a Scottish folk song. The concluding Allegro was a tour de force as the songs were woven together into a lovely musical tapestry. However, it was the utterly gorgeous rendition of the Andante's *I'm Doun For The Lack Of Johnnie* that melted the heart and stayed long in the memory.

Steve Crowther
12th February 2019