

York Guildhall Orchestra  
York Barbican, 14th October 2017

THE Guildhall Orchestra has clearly summered well. A Berlioz overture, a Bartok concerto and a Sibelius symphony, leavened by a couple of bonbons, found the strings sounding fresh, the brass robust and the woodwinds light on their toes. They needed little chivvyng from Simon Wright's baton.

Berlioz's Roman Carnival centres on the furious saltarello danced in the second act of his opera *Benvenuto Cellini*. With violins in ecstatic form here, and eventually at considerable pace, it proved a crowd-pleasing curtain-raiser. By contrast, there was a pensive lilt in Fauré's *Pavane*.

Canadian pianist Grace Huang was a polished soloist in Bartok's Third Concerto, unlike the Steinway she had to play. She took a chamber-style approach, beautifully unforced and often intimate, sustaining a delicate clarity.

In a forest of staccato, she knew where the important trees were to be found and politely pointed them out. The orchestra kept close attendance, if not quite with such subtlety. Her encore, Balakirev's arrangement of Glinka's song *The Lark*, was spellbinding.

A deeply brooding account of Sibelius's *Valse Triste* was the ideal intro to his Fifth Symphony. Here, Wright instinctively knew that the whole work builds towards its noble finale and cannot be allowed to climax too soon. So he kept the brass, in particular, in close order, and forged colourful mood-changes in the slow-movement variations. Excitement bubbled through the finale, until the brass – yes – but also the violins, more lush than ever, cut loose to reach a glorious peak.

Martin Dreyer  
16th October 2017