

## York Guildhall Orchestra York Barbican, 13th October 2018

YORK Guildhall Orchestra embarked on its most ambitious season ever last Saturday, with the first of no less than five programmes, a Beethoven piano concerto sandwiched between an overture and symphony by Brahms.

As ever, Simon Wright was at the helm. His benign demeanour disguised the fact that he drove his players hard: they lapped it up, applauding him at the end. There is little doubt that under his baton they deliver more than they imagine possible.

Piccolo and tuba made their only appearance of the evening in Brahms' Tragic Overture, which was both forceful and determined, if not always especially shapely. But pin-point pizzicato was a good omen for the symphony later.

Martin Roscoe is much more than just a friendly face; he clearly relishes playing alongside others, responding with utmost care. He and Wright were absolutely hand in glove. He treated Beethoven's Third Concerto, in C minor, as chamber music: his shading was elegant, his filigrees before the second theme elegant, and his descending arpeggios after a captivating cadenza beautifully restrained. And that was just the first movement.

His opening to the Largo was equally light, but intense too, and his ornamentation expressive throughout. Fireworks came in the finale, whose episodes were nicely differentiated. The orchestra enjoyed the romp too. Roscoe finally cut loose with thunderous quadruple octaves just before the end.

The woodwind choir, normally so precise, got off to a casual start in Brahms' Fourth, but passion built gradually and discipline was resumed. Cellos were tasty in the Andante's lovely second theme and the scherzo was fun, rhythms springy and chording tight.

The finale's 30 variations emerged in primary colours, boosted by the arrival of the trombones. The orchestra reached terrific form here, with fearless syncopation and daring attacks. Wright had pulled them through once again.

Martin Dryer  
15th October 2018