

***THE SOUND FESTIVAL 2011  
ABERDEEN SINFONIETTA  
THE MUSIC HALL, ABERDEEN  
Sunday, 06 November 2011***

I was at the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's concert on Friday when for a live Radio 3 broadcast they gave one of their best ever performances. After having heard Aberdeen Sinfonietta conducted by Garry Walker on Sunday I have to say that the general standard of performance was not that much below that of the national orchestra. Above all, I was able to relax completely and enjoy all the music with the confidence that I was going to hear not just a good performance but a quite exceptional one.

It began with the piece that qualified this concert to be part of the sound festival namely *Chat Moss* by Peter Maxwell Davies. Chat Moss is a large area of peat bog near Salford which is the birthplace of Maxwell Davies (the town, not the peat bog). As everybody knows he is now an Orcadian where they also have peat bogs aplenty. The piece was originally written to be within the capabilities of a school orchestra but played by a brilliant orchestra it really shines. A large contingent of fine strings along with flutes, oboe trumpet and percussion produced lovely contrasts of light and dark, soft and spiky, woodwind and strings. This could easily have been an Orkney landscape as much as a Salford one. I certainly enjoyed it and I think the rest of the audience did as well.

What followed however was really special. In the *Concerto for violin, cello and orchestra in a minor Op.102* the soloists were Lyn Fletcher, leader of the Hallé Orchestra and Nicholas Trygstad, principal cellist with the same orchestra. Wonderful Brahmsian chords opened the concerto before the cello entered with a marvellous expostulation. As the first movement progressed the violin and cello engaged in a beautiful amorous dialogue with one another and with the orchestra who fully lived up to the luminous playing of the two soloists. There was a lovely minor key passage for the soloists before the orchestra pulled them back into a more assertive and optimistic mood.

Horns and flutes set the sound flavour of the second movement, which was then richly taken up by the cellos and the rest of the strings. A wonderfully warm yet autumnal thread of melody ran through the movement taken up magically by the soloists.

The finale, full of bucolic open-air music gave much longer interludes of discussion to the soloists and again the orchestra went along with them on top form. For this half of the concert Bryan Dargie gave up the leader's chair to Jean Fletcher who just happens to be the sister of the violin soloist.

Bryan was back in the leader's seat for the second half of the concert. Once again there was an affinity with the BBC SSO concert where I thought their performance of the *Second Symphony* by Sibelius was even better than the rest of a top-notch programme. It was the same with the performance of Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9 "From the New World"*. It seemed that every colour in the music was imbued with a special new brightness in this performance.

Even the triangle that rang out in the Scherzo seemed specially souped up for the occasion. The delicious melody of the largo first on cor anglais then later on strings with a gloriously silky smooth rendition from the leader was better than I ever remember hearing and the Finale, taken at a spanking pace by Garry Walker was nothing short of magnificent. Oh! And one final comment, Sinfonietta managed a slightly larger audience than the BBC Orchestra on Friday so if you were at the concert on Sunday, tell all your friends not to miss Sinfonietta's next one. Let's make it a full house.

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