

BBC Philharmonic/Noseda/Bavouzet – review

Tim Ashley - Sunday 4 November 2012



Maverick French pianist Jean-Efflam Bavouzet is among the most generous and indefatigable of performers, sometimes playing two works for piano and orchestra in an evening, rather than the usual one. Such was the case on this occasion, when he tackled Prokofiev's First and Fourth Concertos as the centrepieces of a particularly strong BBC Philharmonic concert, conducted by Gianandrea Nosedà.

Both concertos are eccentric and suit Bavouzet's glamorous playing and quirky temperament well. The First is a one-movement ragbag of themes and styles, written when Prokofiev was only 21. The Fourth, commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein, is for the left hand only and can seem pithy, despite a slow movement of considerable grandeur and weight. The panache and charm that Bavouzet and Nosedà brought to the First proved wonderfully appealing. The Fourth was all morbid humour and sardonic elegance. Bavouzet flung out scales and arpeggios with steely precision. The orchestral sound was impeccably detailed. The piece itself remains unconvincing, but the case for it could not have been better articulated.

Italian music formed the rest of the programme. The overture to Verdi's *I Vespri Siciliani*, furiously performed, left me wondering – not for the first time – why Nosedà is seemingly overlooked by UK opera companies. He closed with Alfredo Casella's Third Symphony. Completed in 1940, it's a remarkable work that reflects the composer's disillusionment with fascism, of which he had initially been a supporter. You can hear Mahler's influence in its complex counterpoint, while the mix of anguished lyricism, harmonic violence and forced jollity carries emotional echoes of Shostakovich. Nosedà, who has been reappraising Casella's work for some time, conducted it with intensity and conviction. Overwhelming stuff, superbly done.