

## Reviews

# Ensemble is hard to fault

Sinfonia Of Birmingham

CBSO Centre

★★★★

The recent Labour Party Spring Conference left Symphony Hall out of bounds and forced the CBSO, including violinist Michael Seal and trumpeter Alan Thomas, to decamp to the CBSO Centre for two concerts on Saturday.

On Sunday Michael and Alan appeared there again – as conductor and soloist respectively – with the Sinfonia of Birmingham, an excellent ensemble which it would be hard to fault even at the highest professional level.

Thomas's account of the Hummel Trumpet Concerto was delivered with incisive, well-focused tone, neat articulation of this showy music's many roulades, deft tonguing, and a persuasive line – more virtuosity than perhaps this empty music, plundering ideas left, right and centre, from greater works by Mozart (who hated the trumpet), deserves.

This was a smiling collaboration between Thomas and Seal's Sinfonia, and certainly the most cheerful music in an evening where everything else battered us with C minor tragedy.

Beethoven's splendid *Coriolan* Overture was tautly driven under Seal's encouraging direction, string sound lively and well-nourished, horns and bassoons outstanding, and orchestral silences bravely judged, with no nerves.

Obviously meticulously-rehearsed, Rudolf Barshai's string orchestra transcription of Shostakovich's Eighth String Quartet was weightily delivered in a sinewy reading which was constantly deeply emotional. Special praise to the fizzing basses in the demonic *allegro molto*.

But what can be said about Mendelssohn's First Symphony? Certainly it is a tour de force of precocious compositional technique for a 15-year-old, but from a much-loved composer, and one whose youthful works generally have more rewarding musical content than those of the even more youthful Mozart, this is an embarrassing piece, though rendered with spirit here by these heroic musicians.

Christopher Morley

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