

# The Daily Telegraph

---

24 March 2006

## Glorious flowering of prodigious talent

**Geoffrey Norris reviews the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Marin Alsop at the Lighthouse in Poole**

This was the performance of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto to take away as the ultimate souvenir of the composer's centenary year.

It is rare to find an interpretation in which the music's impact is at once so shattering and so exhilarating, so firmly in control yet so generous in expression, so organic in conception yet so rich in its detailed exploration of the score. Extraordinary forces were at work here, and they were harnessed with potent artistic resolve.

The soloist was that exceptional young artist James Ehnes, a violinist who can embrace a broad spectrum of repertoire, from solo Bach to sonatas of the 20th century, by way of the overwhelming interpretation of the Elgar Concerto that he took to last year's Brighton Festival.

More important than just being able to play such a wide range of music is that he has the instinct and acumen to probe its stylistic and emotional substance. While we should not perhaps read too much into the fact that he happens to share Mozart's birthday, there is nevertheless a prodigious talent that has been obvious to anyone who has followed the trajectory of Ehnes's career so far, and which is now maturing and flowering gloriously.

His playing of the Shostakovich revealed a marked affinity with the music's temperament, whether in the harrowing threnody of the first movement or the sardonic ebullience of the scherzo, the deep concentration of the third-movement passacaglia or the testing, biting virtuosity of the cadenza and finale.

The performance was akin to watching a great picture take shape.

Fine strokes of timbre, seamless lines, moments of stark or poignant intensity and subtleties of phrasing and dynamics could be appreciated as the work unfolded, but they all had their place in a much greater scheme that spoke of inspiration and sustained processes of thought.

In this respect, as in everything else to do with this riveting concert, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and its conductor Marin Alsop were on matchless form. At the start, the power, energy, punch and finesse of Beethoven's Fidelio overture attested to the players' assurance and Alsop's authority.

In the Shostakovich, the rapport with Ehnes was revealed both in the complementary clarity of orchestral sonorities and in the acute sense of dramatic and expressive weight. The performance of Elgar's Second Symphony that crowned the concert was one of poised sensibility and searing grandeur. A magnificent evening.

*Concert broadcast on BBC Radio 3; programme repeated at Hexagon, Reading (0118 960 6060), both tonight*