

RTÉ Philharmonic Choir, RTÉ NSO/Boyd

MICHAEL DERVAN - NCH, Dublin

Haydn – Symphony No 67; Sinfonia Concertante in B flat; Nelson Mass.

COMETH THE hour, cometh the man. **Douglas Boyd conducted the National Symphony Orchestra's final Haydn bicentenary concert of 2009 and he straightaway elevated himself into the select company of those conductors who have made the NSO sound fully and stylishly at ease with the music of the 18th century.**

Gone was the all-too-familiar over-plump sound that the orchestra often brings to Haydn and Mozart. **The whispered opening of Haydn's Symphony No 67 was light and airy, the music's witty effervescence negotiated with nimble aplomb.**

Sharp contrasts, judicious balances (trumpets that blazed but didn't obliterate) and an invigorating rhythmic spring were all, as it were, on tap, contributing to a real sense of brio, with delicate tenderness at the other end of the scale, and a sure ear for timing in delightful Haydn-esque surprises.

Lightness of touch was a feature, too, of the altogether more genial Sinfonia Concertante for oboe, bassoon, violin and cello, with principal players from the orchestra stepping out as soloists: Adrian Wilson, Michael Jones, Alan Smale and Martin Johnson.

Boyd's conducting style made it easy for the four soloists to assert themselves without having to fight with the weight of the orchestra for prominence. However, the pleasure of the performance was limited by some off-colour moments from Smale, the orchestra's leader.

In the tempest and celebration of the Nelson Mass (tradition has it that Haydn was influenced by Nelson's victory in the Battle of the Nile), **Boyd's approach to the choir allowed for both grandeur and fine detail.** And the four soloists – soprano Ailish Tynan, mezzo soprano Anna Stephany, tenor Ed Lyon and bass Philip O'Reilly – approached their varied tasks with unfettered individuality.

The choir's delivery ranged from the almost ecstatic and declamatory to the merest whisper and, among the soloists, Tynan sang with an enveloping sense of richness that was almost too much for the music but still worked.

Haydn was a near-miraculous composer of affirmative music, and **this was one of those performances which, at the end, lifted the spirits just as the composer would have wanted. Here's hoping that RTÉ invite Boyd back for more of the same.**

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