

(the anything but *Sinfonia semplice*), both in the use of unpitched percussion and the long-held concluding solo wind pedal (here clarinet rather than the bassoon raspberry with which the symphony finishes). I am not always convinced by Oramo's choice of tempi in Nielsen (his account of the *Maskarade* Overture to open the 2015 Proms was slow, and flat, for example), but here his touch was nigh-on perfect.

So, too, in Monnakgotla's vibrant, shimmering *Globe Skimmer Surfing the Somali Jet* (2021-2), the five movements of which (played continuously) evoke the extraordinary, four-generation annual migration of the dragonfly *Pantala flavescens* (the 'globe skimmer' of the title) from northern India (*Prologue: The Dragonflies Ascend*) and back (*Epilogue: Reminiscence of a Home*) via the Maldives (*Surfing the Monsoon*), the Seychelles (*Freshwater Breathing Space*) and East Africa – the last leg achieved via the jet stream (*At the Somali Jet*). The journey is not all travelogue, however: the dragonflies returning to India are the great grandchildren of those that set out and which were not consumed along the way by the hordes of predatory birds that follow in their wake.

Monnakgotla's score-co-commissioned by the BBC with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and Lahti Symphony Orchestras – is composed in a recognisable, post-modern idiom in which instrumental texture plays its part as much as tonality. Right from the outset, the composer wanted the piece to "about dragonflies",

appropriate for the mercurial playing style of Dalene, who, astonishingly, performed this near-half-hour-long piece from memory (as he did the work's Stockholm premiere, earlier in the year). The music flew and danced off the page from the first bar, the instrumental lines buzzing and intertwining like swarms of these beautiful, glimmering insects. The second and fourth movements, evoking the monsoon and the jet stream, are more volatile; if the soloist is the voice – or sound of the wingbeat, of the dragonflies, then the orchestra is that of the winds and clouds, whether heavy-laden with rain or the softer skyscapes when the storms have passed. Orchestra, soloist and composer were treated to rapt attention followed by sustained applause at the conclusion, punctuated only by Dalene's unaccompanied encore, Kreisler's *Recitative and Scherzo*, composed in honour of his mentor, Ysaÿe.

After the interval, Oramo and the BBC Symphony Orchestra played Sibelius' final two symphonies, composed in close proximity in the mid-1920s, performed with scarcely any interval as a kind of meta-symphony. The roots of both pieces stretch back to the sketchbook from 1914-5 which contained the genesis of much of the most significant output of the composer's later years, including the Fifth Symphony which for a time Sibelius considered releasing as a single-span *Fantasia sinfonica*, the title originally given to the Seventh Symphony at its premiere in 1924. No 6 took its composer at least five years to achieve its final form (thankfully

for his nerves out of public sight, unlike No 5), comfortably in four clearly defined movements, and remains one of the subtlest, most nuanced creations ever penned, largely serene in mood, although it has its more anxious and turbulent moments. It was a shame that it was followed with only a momentary pause by the Seventh, especially when performed so compellingly. Oramo laid out its complex interwoven sections with great clarity and the orchestral playing, as in the Sixth, was sublime, not least from principal trombonist Hellen Vollam, who articulated the great theme's recurring appearances very affectingly, with as much purity of tone as power. A glorious concert to finish the year.

Guy Rickards

**Hana McDowell,
Ekaterina Chunikhina
Purcell School Symphony Orchestra /
Paul Mann**

It is always an exciting moment when one encounters a new compositional voice for the first time, and the concert by the Purcell School Symphony Orchestra under Paul Mann at St John's, Smith square on November 30 presented two world premieres – of works by Daniel Fardon (b. 1991) and Laila Arafah (b. 2004) – as well as the first UK public performance of Robin Holloway's *Symphony in F minor*, his scintillating 2008 orchestration of Brahms' Piano Quintet, Op 34. That crowned the Purcell School Symphony Orchestra's first orchestral concerto of the 2023-'4 year, marking 50 years since the School, originally founded in 1962, took its present name. The concert was repeated at the Royal Birmingham Conservatory the following day.

One intriguing thread in the School's compositional course, and their commitment to new music, is the *Purcell Parallels* project, where a student composer pairs with a staff member to produce two new works. The November concert present the fourth and final instalment, juxtaposing Fardon's *August Tune: Running Music* – itself part of a still-incomplete series of works deriving inspiration from specific months of the year – with 19-year-old Laila Arafah's *Slacktide, Warbling*. The pieces were linked not, as one might expect, through a reworking of Purcell or some common music theme, but rather a completely unrelated activity. Fardon is



Tebogo Monnakgotla

a keen runner, and his tone poem was conceived and in part designed while running through Abney Park in North London. Opening with birdsong, *August Tune* is well laid out for the orchestra (*October Tune* – which can be heard on the composer’s website—for instance, is a sextet for piccolo/flute, bass clarinet, piano, percussion, violin & cello). Lying between the main, vigorous outer sections, the central span is more a representation of the exhilaration of running (and the thoughts that occur doing so) as the exercise itself.

The unrelated activity behind Arafah’s *Slacktide, Warbling* was a little more elusive perhaps – baking. There is no attempt, however, to represent the cooking process; indeed, the title suggests a depiction of a riverside foreshore, while the composer’s note told us rather that its “ant-developmental form contributes to a sense of aimlessness within seemingly stretched expanses of time”. I am not entirely convinced, and feel she may have protested too much; *Slacktide, Warbling* strikes me as a very neatly conceived



Ekaterina Chunikhina

whole, especially in terms of texture, and motivically cogent in its own way, too. Arafah has now moved on to the Royal Academy of Music, has started to receive commissions and is a finalist for the London Mozart Players’ Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Prize. We can clearly expect great

things from her.

The orchestra was joined by two alumni to close out the first half. Hana McDowell provided a vivacious and idiomatic account of Bartok’s superb *First Rhapsody* (1928), with some lively playing from the Orchestra’s cimbalomist, and some very nice ensemble from the orchestra throughout. More breathtaking still was the extraordinary virtuosity of oboist Ekaterina Chunikhina in the Concerto written by Martinu in 1956, who received the most substantial ovation before the interval. It was only fitting, though, that the focus should then sit squarely with the orchestra in a very fine performance of the Brahms/Holloway, which has recently been recorded (by the BBC SO) under Paul Mann’s baton. He extracted some fine playing from the students: yes, there were moments of uncertain intonation and ensemble here and there but much more importantly this was a fully convincing performance and Holloway, celebrating his 80th birthday in 2023, seemed well pleased.

Guy Rickards

NEWEST RELEASES FROM

DIVINE ART RECORDINGS GROUP

Global CD and digital distribution through Naxos.

For details and direct secure purchasing visit:
www.divineartrecords.com

BEETHOVEN:
Complete 35 Piano Sonatas
Tamami Honma (piano)

divine art
ddx 21001 (10 CD)

JOHN CARMICHAEL
Orchestral & Chamber works
St Paul’s Sinfonia and others

divine art
ddx 21103

John Boyden - A Celebration
Beethoven & Schubert classics
John Lil/Jan Partridge/NQHO

divine art
ddx 21244 (2CD)

ROBERT SCHUMANN:
Fantasies
Burkard Schliessmann (piano)

divine art
ddc 25753 (3 SACD)

PARALLELS
contemporary organ music
Alexander Finch (organ)

divine art
ddx 21112

J.S. BACH arranged by C. LEE:
(ré)inventions à deux pianos
Chiahu Lee & Yulia Vershinina-Mukhopadhyay

diversions
ddv 24172

LOUIS FRANZ AGUIRRE:
Egungun
SoXXI Percussion Ensemble

ekkozone
02

EDWARD COWIE/LAURA CHISLETT:
In Two Minds
Laura Chislett (flutes) + Edward Cowie (piano)

métier
mex 77121

NICOLA LEFANU:
The Path above the Dunes
Gemini

métier
mex 77112

MICHAEL FINNISS:
Alternative Readings
Lotte Betts-Dean, Marsyas Trio

métier
mex 77102