

London Schools Symphony Orchestra 2002-2015

Artistic Director - Peter Ash

Barbican Programmes and Reviews

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews

2015

7 January 2015

Nielsen *Helios Overture*

Grieg *Piano Concerto*

Rachmaninov *Symphony No 2*

Conductor *Edward Gardner*

Piano *Louis Schwizgebel*

Gardner's conducting was magnificent interpretatively, from first to last, and once again he showed us what a rare talent he is. He captured the work's (Rachmaninov) underlying Russian melancholy to perfection; its excursions into slightly unconvincing higher spirits during the opening movement, its descent into quiet resignation for the Adagio, and its brave attempt at cheerful resolution in the finale... It will have been a tremendous experience for these young people to play under such a conductor as Edward Gardner, and he is much to be commended for taking time to work, as he does, with this and other youth ensembles.

The Classical Source 8 January 2015

14 April 2015

Liszt *Orpheus*

Mozart *Concerto for Two Pianos*

Mendelssohn *Symphony No 3 'Scottish'*

Conductor *Carlos Izcaray*

Pianists *Maria João Pires and Julien Libeer*

22 September 2015

Chabrier *España*

Schumann *Konzertstück for Four Horns and Orchestra*

Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique*

Conductor *Peter Ash*

Horns *Richard Watkins, Nigel Black, Katy Woolley and Michael Thompson*

...Chabrier's España was a good choice for an opener: it's music that even listeners unfamiliar with classical music to any degree will know (or, at least, know one or two of the great tunes in which it abounds) and the work has the capacity to show-off an orchestra in many solos, section-led passages and *tutti*. From the opening bars, Peter Ash's tempos were well-nigh perfectly judged, enabling his keen and sensitive players to give of their best and delivering a performance tingling with life and vitality. On paper, one might have thought Robert Schumann's Konzertstück for four horns an odd choice for an orchestra of young players, for it is not a work that immediately discloses its qualities... It was not, for Schumann's Opus 86 is a rare Concerto not just in instrumentation: the orchestra has a great deal to do, too, and much of the writing is demanding – genuinely participating in the musical argument. ...Quite apart from anything else, this performance was quite superb – and not just from the distinguished soloists. The balance in this difficult work was truly excellent, and Ash's control of this unique score was exemplary. To conclude this Barbican programme Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique received a performance that was deeply impressive. As may be imagined, in the second movement the six harps came truly into their own – Berlioz, we may be sure, would have thoroughly approved, as he would of Ash's reading: once again, the gifted conductor's finely judged tempos, excellent balance and brilliant characterisation, aided by woodwind solos of considerable musicianship, and a full, rich *tutti* that blended the brilliance of each section of this admirable orchestra in compelling fashion. Thus ended an uplifting concert that those taking part and the large audience will remember for a long time.

The Classical Source 23 September 2015

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews 2014

7 January 2014

Barber *Second Essay for Orchestra*
Efrain Oscher *'Mestizo' Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra (UK premiere)*
Tchaikovsky *Symphony No 5*
Conductor *Carlos Izcaray*
Trumpet *Pacho Flores*

...It was in the Tchaikovsky that the LSSO truly excelled, opportunities taken for grand gestures and poignant solos... The perfectly shaped and nuanced horn solo opened the second movement with sensitivity and tenderness, the first bassoon was unfailingly poised and the clarinet soloist provided a beautiful tone and highly-musical playing. More than this though was the sheer energy, enthusiasm and exuberance of players for whom this music is still a discovery and exploration.

The Classical Source 7 January 2014

29 April 2014

Dukas *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*
Ravel *Piano Concerto in G major*
Ravel *L'enfant et les Sortilèges (concert performance with English surtitles)*
Conductor *Dominic Wheeler*
Piano *Tom Poster*

With singers from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama

One cannot fail to be impressed by the concerts that the London Schools Symphony Orchestra, under the aegis of the Centre for Young Musicians and the City of London Corporation, puts on these days. As its name suggests, with players of a young age, it nevertheless produces performances of top-quality, as here. Sure, with further experience will come greater security and interpretative risk, but the quality of the LSSO's sound matches some professional orchestras. The concert was well attended too, despite the tube strike.

It's impossible to consider Paul Dukas's take on Goethe without thinking of Walt Disney's Fantasia with Mickey Mouse getting up to all sorts of mischief, and it does seem that lots of our furry friend's exploits get caught in the musical offering. Dominic Wheeler plotted a careful route through this prickly piece, and got his charges to spring their way along – the work's brilliance extolled, and the punchy bassoon of principal Juliet Webb made a memorable mark against pizzicato strings.

Ravel's G major Piano Concerto was a treat from Tom Poster, who gave an incredibly satisfying account of this wonderful work. He revelled in the jazz elements, bringing them off with flair and vitality. It was an exciting account of the solo part, and he was the ideal counter for the exoticism and languid world of the slow movement. A rather too strict tempo was adhered to for the finale. Nevertheless, there was fun and flow as a whole, with the inner movement beautifully played by everyone.

Ravel's witty, strange, compact and dazzlingly realised score to a charming libretto by Colette for L'Enfant et les sortilèges proved a great vehicle for everyone taking part (the soloists from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama), as well as the lighting department of the Barbican Centre and the designers, for this semi-staged presentation. It was all done simply and effectively: singers in suggestive costumes or holding painted pictures of whichever character they were portraying; and lighting changed to suggest mood or to spot-light singers. The opera itself is a touching work, a child's

temper-tantrum turned against him by his maths homework, the pet cat, the tea-cup, and many other rich and wonderful creations...

Catherine Backhouse was every inch the petulant youngster, and she matched this with her up-front voice. Rick Zwart made much of Armchair, and also ear-catching was Piran Legg as a sturdy Grandfather Clock or a sly Tom Cat. Indeed, the singers brought enjoyment to their characters, and invested in them well. The meowing moggies were a delight. The orchestral playing matched the singers and made an enjoyable outing for this sometime surreal opera. There was swing, beauty, security, and a dash of pathos thrown in, justice done to this eclectic work.

The Classical Source 29 April 2014

22 September 2014

Wagner	<i>Prelude to 'Die Meistersinger'</i>
Glière	<i>Concerto for Harp and Orchestra in E flat major</i>
Strauss	<i>Don Quixote</i>
Conductor	<i>Peter Ash</i>
Harp	<i>Juliana Myslov</i>
Cello	<i>Mats Lidström</i>

The original programme for this concert was to include the American mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton. Following her withdrawal, the talented Russian harpist Juliana Myslov, a current member of the LSSO, who appeared in the 2014 BBC Young Musician of the Year competition and in the same period last spring, at the age of 17, won the Dutch International Harp Competition, stepped in.

Despite her youth, Juliana Myslov is already a fully mature musician. Glière's Harp Concerto is a substantial, three-movement work of around 25 minutes' duration. Myslov played it quite superbly, from memory – no insignificant feat on her part. Her musicianship and artistry were outstanding. The orchestral partnership from her colleagues was excellent, revealing the work to be more than well worth hearing occasionally – and this was an occasion. Her playing of the long first movement cadenza was wholly compelling, and her revelation of the finale's melodious second subject was most winning: a truly fine performance.

The Mastersingers Prelude opened the evening: ...in this performance one could readily admire the commitment and musicality of each player. Peter Ash's tempos were first-class, ...the essence of this indestructible masterpiece was laid out for us with dedication and genuinely adept musicianship from all.

Don Quixote could have been a difficult choice for the orchestra, but the musicians would have learned much from studying this unique masterwork from the inside, so to speak, and if Strauss's virtuoso writing stretched the young players, the audience was held throughout by Peter Ash's commanding control and insight. ... aided by the LSSO's principal viola, Joanna Patrick, whose playing of the important Sancho Panza role was outstanding – she is clearly another star in the making. The less-scaled solo violin passages were equally masterfully played by the LSSO's leader, Filip Ćwizewicz – he is also a fine young player. This concert of dedicated music-making by gifted young Londoners proved a real tonic – with no musician being too dominant!

The Classical Source 24 September 2014

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews 2013

9 January 2013

J. Strauss Jr. *The Bat Overture*
H.K. Gruber *Frankenstein!!*
Stravinsky *Circus Polka: For a Young Elephant*
J. Strauss Sr. *Radetzky March*
Schwertsik *With Giant Boots*
Stravinsky *Firebird Suite (1919)*
Conductor and Chansonnier *H.K. Gruber*

Inviting the ebullient Austrian composer H.K. Gruber to conduct a concert with the LSSO was a moment of inspiration...The Circus Polka brought playing of real panache and ...the Suite from The Firebird was as exciting as in many a professional performance.

Financial Times 14 January 2013

15 April 2013

Shostakovich *Cello Concerto No 1*
Mahler *Symphony No 4*
Conductor *Steuart Bedford*
Cello *Mats Lidström*
Soprano *Charmian Bedford*

24 September 2013

Vaughan Williams *The Lark Ascending*
Glière *Concerto for Coloratura Soprano and Orchestra*
Strauss *An Alpine Symphony*
Conductor *Peter Ash*
Violin *Krycia Osostowicz*
Soprano *Emily Hindrichs*

....this performance (Strauss) was wholly admirable and at times moving and most exciting. In these latter regards, no praise is too high for the inspiring control of the conductor on this occasion. Peter Ash certainly had the measure of this great work, manifestly inspiring the players to give more than their best, individually and throughout each section of the orchestra. Timpani and percussion, especially, were astonishingly good, reinforcing and blending with the rest of the orchestra excellently - as, indeed, did the unseen offstage brass... ..in terms of application, commitment and genuine musicianship, as well as evincing a total belief in the score, this was a performance (Strauss) that would have earned the composer's enthusiastic endorsement. The result was deeply impressive on many levels - no praise could be too high for the musician's dedication, or for Peter Ash's control of his vast (circa 120-strong) orchestra.

The Classical Source 25 September 2013

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews 2012

4 January 2012

Ginastera	<i>Estancia Ballet Suite</i>
Korngold	<i>Violin Concerto</i>
Castellanos	<i>Santa Cruz de Pacairigua</i>
Gershwin	<i>An American in Paris</i>
Conductor	<i>Carlos Izcaray</i>
Violin	<i>Marthew Trusler</i>

The LSSO is seriously good, with a well-defined sense of corporate discipline. It represents musical education in the capital extremely well... What distinguished this concert was not just the exuberance of the playing or the charisma of Venezuelan conductor Carlos Izcaray, making his UK debut, but the astute choice of programme...Capitalising on Izcaray's roots, the LSSO opted for a lively selection of music from the Americas that was as much fun to hear as it evidently was to play. It showcased the orchestra's extrovert energy and sense of balance...Whenever rhythmic precision or communal self-expression was needed, the LSSO proved the equal of any youth orchestra...

Financial Times 5 January 2012

Ginastera's *Estancia* is right out of the Simon Bolivar Orchestra encore book, and the LSSO had the right conductor to propel it like a stampede across the pampas - the whipper young Venezuelan Carlos Izcaray. He also encouraged fierce, joyous playing in Evencio Castellanos' *Santa Cruz de Pacairigua*. And I admired the care with which these teenagers accompanied Matthew Trusler in Korngold's sumptuous Violin Concerto. One feels a surge of optimism when tomorrow's musicians show empathy towards such varied repertoire.

The Times 9 January 2012

18 April 2012

Elgar	<i>Cockaigne Overture</i>
Stravinsky	<i>Fireworks</i>
Rameau	<i>Suite from Les Boreades</i>
Handel	<i>Royal Fireworks Music</i>
Ravel	<i>Daphnis and Chloé Suite No 2</i>
Conductor	<i>Nicholas Kraemer</i>

24 September 2012

Rimsky-Korsakov	<i>Russian Easter Overture</i>
Elgar	<i>Sea Pictures</i>
Sibelius	<i>Symphony No 1</i>
Conductor	<i>Peter Ash</i>
Mezzo soprano	<i>Jamie Barton (UK debut)</i>

This London Schools Symphony Orchestra concert was especially celebratory coming on the return of a triumphant tour in the Czech Republic. So it was appropriate to open with a festive work by Rimsky-Korsakov. Under Peter Ash's clear direction, elegant with no fuss, this sparkling work was dispatched with flair and panache that recalled Stokowski's vintage recording though, of course, without quite the tonal allure of "The Fabulous Philadelphians".

Having let rip in the first work, a more dappled sound was drawn from the players to accompany the American mezzo-soprano, Jamie Barton, in Elgar's *Sea Pictures*. The programme note reminded us of Thomas Beecham's remark that the first soloist, none other than Clara Butt, had so powerful a voice that, on a clear day, it could be heard across the English Channel. Barton's voice has not yet reached such power or volume but she does command a lovely rich middle tone and ringing higher notes; the 'Gerontius moment' halfway through the third song produced tears in the eyes of more than one listener. Elgar has never received his due in this work. The text is of its time, but when given under such loving direction as we heard from Ash and his attentive players, *Sea Pictures* rises in estimation. A sympathetic soloist helps and Jamie Barton's British debut was a triumph.

Written in the same year as the Elgar, 1899, Sibelius's First Symphony blows away lots of late-Romantic cobwebs. Initially sketched as a symphonic poem to be called *A Musical Dialogue*, Sibelius possibly was spurred onto composing a purely abstract symphony having been usurped in writing the first such work in Finland by his much younger contemporary, Ernst Mielck two years earlier. Mielck was tragic figure. A genuine prodigy (which Sibelius certainly was not in his younger days), he studied in Berlin under Max Bruch and wrote his symphony in 1897, only to die two years later at the age of 22, ironically the year of Sibelius's own effort.

This LSSO performance was astonishingly virile. Ash inspired his players to the heights of passionate expression. Perhaps some subtleties were glossed over; the entry of the strings after the magical (and superbly played) clarinet solo at the very beginning was hardly *mf*, more a hard *ff*, and the horns tended to obscure the strings at times, but the final apotheosis of the wonderful string theme in the finale was as stirring as could be, allowing the coda to erupt in full glory.

The Classical Source 28 September 2012

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews

2011

5 January 2011

Prokofiev *Romeo and Juliet (selections)*
 Wagner *Tristan and Isolde - Prelude and Liebestod*
 Beethoven *Symphony No 5*
 Conductor *Peter Ash*
 Soprano *Alwyn Mellor*

This performance (Beethoven 5) blazed. It was vigorous, straightforward and jubilant...The joy and triumph of the finale was vibrant and youthful. The symphony held a simple story, but its narrative shone.

The Classical Source 6 January 2011

27 April 2011

Berlioz *Roman Carnival Overture*
 Britten *Symphony for Cello and Orchestra*
 Sibelius *Karelia Suite*
 Respighi *Pines of Rome*
 Conductor *Leif Segerstam*
 Cello *Pia Segerstam*

With regional orchestras dropping from a thousand short-sighted wholesale cuts...it should be enough just to celebrate 60 seasons of the LSSO, safe for now under the City of London's munificent wing. But last night was more than just another fun concert. No one ought to miss any appearance of the enormously charismatic Leif Segerstam...Respighi's *Pines of Rome* is always a good showcase for large youth orchestra forces, and duly unfurled with inscaped splendour as the ancient Roman buccine fanfared from the Barbican Hall's grand circle; but here too, Segerstam brought his own sound to bear in the unique depths of string tone that turned the auditorium, somehow, into a resonating cathedral for the central rites of catacombs and Janiculum. And he took a liberty with the swelling chant of underground Christians - starting loud with unforgettable contrabassoon edge, rising to apocalyptic. Yes, the Segerstam crescendo is unique, as is the man himself, who ambled out to the front stalls at the end to encourage a standing ovation for his fabulous young players.

The Arts Desk 28 April 2011

27 September 2011 - 60th Anniversary Concert

Elgar <i>In the South (Alassio) Opus 50</i>	Conductor, Nicholas Kraemer
Delius <i>The Walk to the Paradise Garden</i>	Conductor, Harry Ogg
Britten <i>The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra</i>	Conductor, Stuart Bedford
Handel <i>Concerto for Harp Op. 4 No. 6</i>	Harp, Oliver Wass
Walton <i>Suite from Henry V</i>	Conductor, Sir Richard Armstrong
Vaughan Williams <i>Serenade to Music</i>	Conductor, Peter Ash

Paul Westwood (narrator in Walton)

Serenade to Music: soloists in order of appearance

Charmian Bedford, George Freeburn, Finnegan Downie Dear, Paul Nilon, Dominic Kraemer, Joan Rodgers, Louise Alder, Richard Fallas, Misha Mullov-Abbado, Stephen Alder, Richard Savage, Tamsin Dives, Raphaela Papadakis, Chrissy Kinsella, Alwyn Mellor & Elaine Lewis

Sixty years young – literally – the London Schools Symphony Orchestra offered a Gala Concert to showcase its collective and individual talents. The LSSO's history is now in print form, "The Story So Far 1951-2011", a concise programme-sized publication, and the concert brought us up to date with a generous selection of music dedicatedly performed. Although, from the off and elsewhere, there were a few tuning deficiencies, issues of intonation and ensemble, and some individual awkwardness, Elgar's *In the South* – would his *Cockaigne (In London Town) Concert Overture* have been more appropriate? – there was an impressive sweep and sensitivity to this account of Italy-inspired panorama directed by Nicholas Kraemer and displaying a poetic viola solo from Rory Storm.

Then 20-year-old Harry Ogg immediately impressed. He's a gifted musician and a lucid conductor. In Delius's *Walk to the Paradise Garden* Ogg drew some very confident playing, not least from confiding strings, finding the interior of the music in no uncertain terms. On this showing, Harry Ogg is someone to keep a very particular eye on. Stuart Bedford has a direct line to Benjamin Britten's music, which showed in a particularly clear-sighted account of Britten's 1946 *Purcell Variations and Fugue* (it's *Young Person's Guide* when a narrator is present). Avoiding pomposity from the initial statement of Purcell's *Abdelazar 'Rondeau'*, Bedford ensured that the score's many tricky corners were turned elegantly and the numerous solos were confidently essayed. Only at the close, when Purcell is grandiosely returned, did some details disappear in the continuing *Fugue*, but overall this was a conception to match the composer's own (yardstick) recording. (The programme note for this work suggested the originality of Britten's use of 'solo' percussion; brilliant writing, yes, but Varèse had completed *Ionisation*, entirely for percussion, in 1931, and Bartók's innovations in the 'kitchen department' should not be forgotten.)

The concert's second half opened with the gentle balm of Handel. Whether for harp, or for organ, this is a delightful piece, especially in the terpsichorean measures of the first movement. If Harry Ogg served notice of great things to come as a conductor then so too did Oliver Wass as a harpist. He played with enviable *sang-froid*, the lightest of touches and the most responsive of musicianship. It was a shame that the dinky-looking organ was inaudible, but the handful of strings and pair of flautists made chamber music. No conductor needed!

Walton's film music was less happy for all that Sir Richard Armstrong (currently working wonders at ENO with Weinberg's *The Passenger*) was alive to the five movements' evocation, vivid description, poignancy and the music's capacity to stir. What sunk the whole was speech-maker Paul Westwood (a graduate from Guildhall School) being amplified; he really should have projected and not relied on artificial means. He was often too loud and suffered the Barbican Hall's bass-tilted sound-system, which occluded some syllables. His diction was evidently excellent, though, and he spoke with welcome naturalness – although "Once more unto the breach, dear friends..." was hardly rousing – but, whatever happens in Olivier's film, the imposition of speech on any part of those two masterpieces for

string orchestra ('The Death of Falstaff' & 'Touch her soft lips and part') is disappointing, shall we say, and also goes against Muir Matheson's concert-hall intentions.

Equilibrium was returned with Ralph Vaughan Williams's Serenade to Music in its 16-singer original version (it can also be performed with chorus or, indeed, without The Merchant of Venice text). With the singers placed towards the back of orchestra (with no loss of audibility!), if variable in quality from one to another, this glorious, moonlit score of singular loveliness was a wonderful way to conclude the evening, Peter Ash (LSSO's Artistic Director) ensuring the music and singers could breathe artlessly. We weren't done – a card was presented to Ash simply worded "Thank You Peter" and he then conducted 'Jupiter' from Holst's The Planets – and it was indeed 'The Bringer of Jollity'!

The Classical Source 27 September 2011

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews

2010

5 January 2010

Adams *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*

Britten *Piano Concerto*

Dvorak *Symphony No. 9*

Conductor *Arvo Volmer*

Piano *Edward Pick*

In the run-up to their 60th anniversary in 2011, the London Schools Symphony Orchestra assembled for the first of their three Barbican concerts of the year. These young players, who rehearse only in holiday breaks, dared to use John Adams's *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* as an exhilarating workout, with the brass right on cue for this four-minute minimalist fanfare, and every instrument in the orchestra capitalising on what Adams himself has called the "almost sadistic" sensation of high speed and close confinement generated within this rhythmic tunnel.

On the podium was the charismatic chief conductor of the Estonian National Opera, Arvo Volmer. Britten's youthful Piano Concerto responded well to the clarity and supple sensitivity of his direction, and to the imaginative pianism of young Edward Pick, who clearly relished his attempt to recreate the composer's intoxication with his own precocious prowess.

With adrenalin coursing from the Adams, the orchestra met Pick's sparkly octaves with neat trombone playing, thudding bows and a delicious clarinet solo in the second movement *Waltz*. Pick's limpid sequences at the start of the *Impromptu* led to the swinging stride of horns and dark woodwind, before the joviality of the final *March*.

The Times 8 January 2010

Now in its 59th season, the London Schools Symphony Orchestra – newly related to the Guildhall School of Music via the Centre for Young Musicians – here played a challenging programme that offered abundant opportunities for the players to display their talents. Drawn from schools all around the capital, the orchestra members are mostly in their mid-teens, and all three works showed that a lot of hard work had gone into preparing for the concert. They were conducted by, and clearly had a close rapport with, Arvo Volmer, who is currently Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of Estonian National Opera. In John Adams's joyous *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* Volmer obtained an energetic and committed response from his players. Right from the start the beat was suitably steady, and while a slightly faster tempo might have generated a greater degree of momentum, there was enough forward propulsion to ensure that the piece was an exhilarating opener.

Britten's Piano Concerto makes great demands on orchestra and soloist alike. The first movement ('Toccata'), as well as being tender and capricious, needs to pack a punch. It started at a vigorous pace, with brass and winds excelling, and, later, there was some really expressive playing from the string sections. Edward Pick was up to all the technical demands of the work, but it was in his playing of the more contemplative passages that he made the greatest impact, especially following the cadenzalike episode, where he and the orchestra achieved a notable sense of tranquility. Together they also neatly caught the irony of the 'Waltz' movement, in which clarinetist Anthony Friend proved notably sweettoned. The opening statement of the revised third movement ('Impromptu') was delivered rather dryly, but as the movement progressed Pick and the orchestra nicely captured its dreamy mysteriousness and achieved a tender conclusion. The finale ('March') got under way with some rich-toned playing from cellos and double basses. Greater percussiveness from the piano might have been welcome at certain moments, but the soloist ranged broadly across the instrument's spectrum with a sure touch, and the orchestra accompanied him securely towards a brilliant ending.

The Classical Source 8 January 2010

21 April 2010

Berlioz *Harold in Italy*
Franck *Symphony in D minor*
Conductor *Robin O'Neill*
Viola *Joshua Hayward*

This (Franck) was a magnificent performance, full of fire and passion, and performed with much understanding; at no point did Robin O'Neill hold back and the musicians played for all they were worth...a rip-roaring performance...ended in a real blaze of glory.

The Classical Source, 21 April 2010

28 September 2010

Glinka *Ruslan and Ludmilla – Overture*
Rachmaninov *Piano Concerto No.3 in D minor, Op.30*
Stravinsky *Petrushka [1947 version]*
Conductor *Peter Ash*
Piano *Aleksandar Madzar*

Peter Ash chose a brisk tempo for Glinka's Overture making it a sparkling concert opener. Too fast? No, the music can take it and Ash directed a truly festive and brilliant account of it.

There followed a straightforward performance, one without frills, of Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto that proved its greatness. There was no attempt to play up the romantic side of the work, nor was there any overt display of virtuosity. Aleksandar Madzar and Ash were at one in bringing Rachmaninov's work to life, without overstating anything. *Rubato*, the curse of so much romantic music, was kept to a minimum and the ebb and flow of the music proceeded without hindrance, Madzar playing with such apparent ease that the music seemed to simply flow from his body, through his fingers, to his waiting audience. This was a bewitching performance which held us spellbound at the epic simplicity of his interpretation. Ash wasn't afraid to let his players take centre-stage when the opportunity allowed and, at times, this work became a real challenge of man against beast, as a great concerto should be.

Because of his employing a very large body of strings – there were over 40 violins! – Ash's interpretation of *Petrushka* was more amorous than I'd ever heard it. But this music is on the very cusp of the move from romanticism to modernism and can stand this kind of approach. Ash characterised each dance beautifully and he wove together the colourful vignettes into a very satisfactory whole. Virtuoso playing was the order of the day and the LSSO played with a superb verve and vigour; Hamish Bain's piano-playing was most impressive and exciting. An auspicious start to the LSSO's new season.

The Classical Source 28 September 2010

Barbican Programmes and Reviews 2009

7 January 2009

Segerstam *Symphony No. 189 'Marimekko' (world premiere)*

Sibelius *Violin Concerto*

Sibelius *Symphony No. 7*

Conductor Leif Segerstam

Violin Elina Vahala

There are plenty of reasons to be depressed about the state of musical education in Britain today. But to witness a London Schools Symphony Orchestra event is to realise that all is not lost...Last night (Segerstam's) Symphony No. 189 was heard for the first time. Rising to the challenge, the young players brilliantly demonstrated both the improvisatory flair and the communal discipline required.

Evening Standard 8 January 2009

22 April 2009

Dvorak *Scherzo Capriccioso*

Chopin *Piano Concerto No. 2*

Brahms *Symphony No. 2*

Conductor/Piano Tamás Vásáry

23 September 2009

Rossini *'William Tell' Overture*

Mendelssohn *Violin Concerto*

Strauss *Till Eulenspiegel*

Ravel *La Valse*

Conductor Peter Ash

Violin Matthew Trusler

The atmosphere was crowded and jolly. Mother and fathers, brother and sisters, schoolmates and friends turned out in force to acclaim the members of the London Schools Symphony Orchestra. A further cause for joy was news that the Centre for Young Musicians, which fosters the LSSO had, this day, become officially associated with the Guildhall School of Music. In the 'Overture' to "William Tell"...the call of the hunting horns fired the occasion blazingly - a triumph of precision and display. Mendelssohn's E minor Violin Concerto was gentle and lyrical...forward-moving but not rushed. Matthew Trusler played with a suave, effective bow. He lent the occasion an understated brilliance of display...Till Eulenspiegel was deliciously earthy. Performers thrived on Strauss's sudden changes of tempo. The contrast between this and then the steely elegance of La Valse must have been an extraordinary experience for these youngsters. Rightly, Peter Ash showed La Valse to be a precise piece of writing, intermittent depicting veils and vagueness, through waltz-like surges, rather than the cloudy, spineless effusion often presented. What a variety of styles, what a variety of paces, Peter Ash put the LSSO through in these four disparate pieces! His conducting was a model of clarity and indication of the mood required. The LSSO rose to each challenge splendidly.

The Classical Source 23 September 2009

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews 2008

8 January 2008

Janacek *Jealousy*
Strauss *Horn Concerto No 1*
Dvorak *Symphony No. 6*
Conductor Sir Richard Armstrong
Horn Stephen Stirling

The significance of a youth orchestra lies less in its achievement, than in what it portends for the future – and in what it says about the climate in which its playing has developed. We currently have two global benchmarks against which all youth orchestras should be measured.

Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is recruited from both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide; Gustavo Dudamel's Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra comes from the poorest parts of Venezuela. Although Barenboim's band is impressive, it is Dudamel's that leaves London critics speechless with admiration.

Britain's two leading youth orchestras have just taken the stage. At the Roundhouse, we heard the National Youth Orchestra: aged 13 to 19, and with a distinction in Grade 8 as the entry qualification, the players must meet stiff technical requirements.

Yet how dull their concert was: they could play all the notes in some demanding music – interludes from Britten's Peter Grimes, and Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet – but there was no flicker of the beauty and excitement latent in these works. The Roundhouse acoustic didn't help, but the real problem lay in Scottish composer James MacMillan's puddingy presence on the podium.

The visibly younger London Schools Symphony Orchestra had assistance from a better acoustic at the Barbican, but the exhilarating fizz they produced in Janacek, Strauss and Dvorak was, at least in part, because they had an inspirational conductor in Sir Richard Armstrong.

From its first explosive notes, the terse sound-drama of Janacek's "Jealousy" sprang vividly to life. And as the orchestra laid out the terrain for soloist Stephen Stirling in Strauss's Horn Concerto No 1 – and provided a rich underpinning for him – one felt in good hands. The strings had expressive warmth, and the woodwind textures were fastidiously calibrated, as they were in the final work, Dvorak's Symphony No 6. There were some glorious moments in the Adagio, and the Scherzo lived up to its subtitle, "Furiant". The finale had rough edges, but it was filled with a bounding, joyful energy. In sum, our kids can do it, too – provided they have leadership and ambition.

The Independent, 10 January 2008

22nd April 2008

Britten *Sinfonia da Requiem*
Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*
Elgar *Enigma Variations*
Conductor Nicholas Kraemer
Dante String Quartet

23rd September 2008 -

Rimsky-Korsakov *Capriccio Espagnol*
Strauss *Four Last Songs*
Tchaikovsky *Symphony No.4*
Conductor Peter Ash
Soprano Joan Rodgers

This (Tchaikovsky) was a superb performance with excellent, forceful work by the brass and woodwind sections, although the strings also produced some really lush playing in a very thoughtful interpretation.

The Classical Source, 24 September 2008

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews
2007

9 January 2007

Tchaikovsky *Romeo and Juliet: Fantasy Overture*
Bernstein *Arias from West Side Story*
Tchaikovsky *Waltz and Polonaise from Eugene Onegin*
Tchaikovsky *Letter Scene from Eugene Onegin*
Bernstein *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*

Conductor Michael Morgan
Soprano Joan Rodgers

30 April 2007

Wagner *Ride of the Valkyries*
Mozart *Concerto for Two Pianos, K365*
Dubrovai *After Mozart (UK premiere)*
Bruckner *Symphony No 4*

Conductor/Piano Tamás Vásáry
Piano Tamás Erdi

Quirky, high-risk programmes give the LSSO its niche among youth orchestras...this LSSO's current stars are the brass, with a principal horn whose fluency would have sounded at home in any professional orchestra. *The Independent, 3 May, 2007*

25 September 2007

Debussy *Danses sacrée et profane*
Strauss *Death and Transfiguration*
Wagner *Götterdämmerung: Dawn and Siegfried's Rhine Journey, Siegfried's Death and Funeral Procession, Brunhilde's Immolation Scene*

Conductor Peter Ash
Soprano Alwyn Mellor

This autumn's concert under Peter Ash must surely have been one of its most venturesome ever: big scores by Strauss and Wagner, tackled with enthusiasm, verve and accomplishment...The orchestra responded magnificently ("Immolation scene"), whether reduced to a sympathetic whisper or soaring confidently to its ecstatic conclusion. *The Evening Standard, 27 September 2007*

The LSSO has been giving concerts with school-age musicians since 1951....With Alwyn Mellor providing an assured, affecting Brunhilde, and because of excellent playing, the music surged forward to an electrifying final climax. I would have been thrilled hearing a concert such as this from a professional orchestra, but from the young players of the LSSO under their fine conductor it was nothing less than astonishing. *The Classical Source, 25 September 2007*

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews
2006

10 January 2006

Wagner *Act III Prelude to Lohengrin*
Brahms *Violin Concerto in D Major Op 77*
Stravinsky *Firebird Suite (1919)*

Conductor Cem Mansur
Violin Alexander Markov

2 May 2006

Brahms *Variations on a theme of Haydn*
Bartók *Bluebeard's Castle*

Conductor Peter Ash
Mezzo-soprano Andrea Meláth
Bass-baritone Mihály Kálmándi

Bluebeard's Castle" was semi-staged...The scenes were bathed in different colours: darkening as Bluebeard and Judith entered the castle...glowing red stage-left whenever the walls wept blood...and glaring with sudden brilliance when she let the light in... The LSSO was spellbinding...They conveyed the brooding, doom-laden atmosphere sure-footedly - the quiet foreboding and the full horror, the love and anguish, the dark and the light, the blood...What an accolade - and how deserved!

The Classical Source, 8 May 2006

12 September 2006

Puccini *La Tregenda from 'Le villi'*
Rachmaninov *Piano Concerto No 2, Op. 18*
Berlioz *Symphonie fantastique*

Conductor Peter Ash
Piano Aleksandar Madzar

..it is the climactic Witches' Sabbath that is the symphony's showpiece, and Ash encouraged his players to get their teeth into its garish glissandos and off-centre rhythms. They went at it with a will, building an orgiastic momentum to make many full-time orchestras proud..

The Evening Standard, 13 September 2006

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews 2005

10 January 2005

Liszt *Piano Concerto No. 2*

Rachmaninov *Symphony No. 1*

Conductor/Pianist Tamás Vásáry

For over half a century the LSSO has offered gifted young musicians the chance to study and perform major symphonic repertoire under the direction of some of the world's leading conductors and soloists...The LSSO despite an unmistakably green and youthful sound, handled the symphony's contrasts of impulsive, brutal energy and sweeping lyrical intensity with maturity and insight...While this was clearly the LSSO's night, all eyes were on Vasary during the concert's closing minutes when he indulged - to the delight of audience and orchestra alike - in two hair-raising encores: Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso, Op.14 and Liszt's La Campanella. Here was pianism at its most thrilling and captivating.

The Pianist Magazine January 2005

5 April 2005

Sibelius *Finlandia*

Segerstam *Symphony No. 113 (world premiere)*

Nielsen *Symphony No. 4 "The Inextinguishable"*

Conductor Leif Segerstam

The London Schools Symphony Orchestra is more ambitious than most youth orchestras. Here it gave a difficult Nordic programme under Finnish conductor Leif Segerstam...the new piece was by Segerstam himself...the young players made a superb job of it.

The Guardian 8 April 2005

Long a byword for polished and inspirational concerts, the LSSO was for once deserted by its usual large Barbican audience. Could it have been the prospect of Leif Segerstam's Symphony no 113? Even in the unlikely event that they had heard some of the other 112, LSSO supporters have become used to premieres and are willing to give novelty a go. More likely is that London hardly ever witnesses this unique composer-conductor's extraordinary musicianship, which ought to be the stuff of legend but has barely had the chance to take him beyond cult status.

The Independent 8 April 2005

22 September 2005

Cherubini *Overture to Ali Baba*

Prokofiev *Piano Concerto No. 3*

Mahler *Symphony No. 1*

Conductor Peter Ash

Piano Aleksandar Madzar

Peter Ash, the Artistic Director of the LSSO, has transformed the orchestra since I heard a moribund and poorly executed Sibelius Fifth Symphony some years ago. He is also generous, allowing other conductors to help train and develop the players' skills... a life-affirming account of Mahler's glorious First Symphony, resplendent in its joyous lyricism and defiant gestures...standards of performance that literally stun the senses.

The Classical Source 22 September 2005

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews
2004

7 January 2004

Wagner *Prelude to Die Meistersinger*
Mozart *Piano Concerto in C Major K467*
Bartók *Concerto for Orchestra*

Conductor/Piano Tamás Vásáry

26 April 2004

Prokofiev *'March and Scherzo' from Love for Three Oranges*
Paganini *Concerto No.2 "La Campanella"*
Tchaikovsky *Symphony No. 5*

Conductor Cem Mansur
Violin Alexander Markov

28 September 2004

Sibelius *The Minpins* (UK premiere)

Conductor Peter Ash
Violin Kana Kawashima
Narrator Robbie Coltrane

One of the best youth orchestras around, the LSSO can always be relied upon to give very grown-up performances - but usually to grown-up audiences. This concert was different, as the cross-section of ages that filled the Barbican testified. There was indeed something for everyone in this performance of *The Minpins*, which brought together the fantastic world of Roald Dahl's last work and a generous amount of Sibelius, some of it seldom heard in the concert hall. Conceived by Donald Sturrock and Peter Ash, the LSSO's artistic director who was also on the podium here, *The Minpins* makes such a natural but previously unthought-of match between Sibelius and Dahl that it just had to happen... Under Ash's strong and sympathetic guidance, the orchestra itself played with warmth and a startling grasp of the idiom... coming from a group of teen-agers these performances were little short of phenomenal.

The Times 30 September 2004

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews 2003

21 January 2003

Kodály *Háry János: Suite*
Ravel *Tzigane*
Shostakovich *Symphony No. 5*

Conductor Thomas Sanderling
Violin Alina Ibragimova

The concert scene may take time to come alive every January, but the London Schools Symphony Orchestra's annual new year appearance is always a beacon along the way. ..On the podium, Thomas Sanderling was as valuable for his theatre experience...as for the personal authority he brought to the Shostakovich...The conductor's connections...with Shostakovich must have inspired these young players, because right from the beginning of his Fifth Symphony there was an authentic and uneasy desolation that can elude even experienced orchestras...Rightly, the slow movement became the emotional heart of the work, but the movements on either side were ferociously driven and utterly compelling. Whatever the politicians and pillars of other establishments may suppose, the LSSO is truly one of London's most valuable institutions.

The Times January 2003

28 April 2003

Mussorgsky (orch. Ravel) *Pictures at an Exhibition*
Vladimir Tarnopolski *Roald Dahl's Cinderella** (world premiere)

Conductors Nicholas Kraemer and Peter Ash*
Narrators included Geraldine James

Roald Dahl has often been hailed as the greatest children's writer of all time, and with the inspired music of Vladimir Tarnopolski, Dahl's version of the fairy tale entered a new genre. Cinderella was performed on a mammoth scale (260+), with the LSSO being joined by an orchestra and chorus assembled from the network of Junior Youth Centres for Young Musicians, which are spread across the capital. The music is constructed from a well-developed set of motives, some based solely on rhythm, others defined by orchestration. The most successful were the rhythmic ones, which formed complex cross-rhythms with various portions of the text. The most spectacular use of this device formed the foundation of the finale, which involved every group of performers, including the orchestra, actors and chorus, chanting about the delights of jam. Superficial and childish as this may appear to those who have not yet discovered the joys of Roald Dahl...it was one of many musical attributes that formed part of this resounding success...The leadership of the conductor, Peter Ash, was superlative throughout, managing to encompass all the differing ability levels of the performers under his direction. My only regret is that this was the only performance scheduled; however, I am sure it will not be the last.

Opera Magazine July 2003

22 September 2003

Dove *Run to the edge* (world premiere commission by the Royal Philharmonic Society)
Elgar *Cello Concerto*
Brahms *Symphony No. 2*
Conductor Peter Ash
Cello Louise Hopkins

LSSO Barbican Programmes and Reviews 2002

8 January 2002

Britten *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*
Mahler *Symphony No. 4*
Conductor Benjamin Zander
Soprano Janice Watson

Here was the triumph of youth.

The Sunday Times 13 January 2002

...the British-born, American-resident conductor Benjamin Zander was on the podium; here is a personality in which the music, education and business worlds intersect, and all three are vital to the continuing success of the LSSO. Zander is a great communicator and inspirational with young musicians, and only the most jaded would not have relished the performance he and the LSSO put together of Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. This, of course was designed for young people to hear, not necessarily to play, and it makes big demands which were well-met here... Zander is also a noted Mahlerian... The slow movement had tranquility and emotional depth seemingly beyond these players' years. Setting the seal on this performance was Janice Watson's soprano solo... she told the story of St Ursula with special radiance. The close seemed more dreamy than in many more "grown-up" performances.

The Times 11 January 2002

8 April 2002

Rimsky-Korsakov *Capriccio Espagnol*
Strauss *Four Last Songs*
Robinson *A Summa Caelo* (world premiere)
Ravel *La Valse*
Conductor Stuart Bedford
Soprano Jennifer Smith

11 September 2002

Beethoven *Symphony No 8*
Bartók *Piano Concerto No. 3*
Sibelius *Symphony No. 7*
Conductor Peter Ash
Piano György Sándor

How heart-warming and positive it was to see and hear György Sándor at this concert. Even at the best of times such creative longevity would have been poignant; a year on from, the ultimate in terrorism, this was special, a signal of continuance made more precious by Sándor playing with an orchestra of which even the oldest member would have been more than 70 years his junior. The programme note informed that Sándor is 90 "this month" so whether he had actually reached his great age on this day I know not. Irrespective, he played with such vitality that the years dropped away... The standing ovation to acclaim Sándor owed something to his status: I hope too that it was appreciation of his illuminating and clear-sighted rendition, which went straight to the heart and mind of the composer. Sándor's Bach encore, given as an encapsulation of life and faith, was enough for the evening... American Peter Ash, the LSSO's new Artistic Director, certainly seems the right man to lead the orchestra to a bright future in terms of the youngsters' enthusiasm and preparation. The Beethoven was muscular and energetic, a worked-at and full-toned account that made no compromise... this was an invigorating and confident performance. The purer altitude of Sibelius's masterpiece was negotiated with considerable expertise and the vibrant alert playing in the Bartók was impressive. A celebration of life and music, this concert combined living history with those on their first musical adventures. Such convergence proved a memorable meeting point to reflect and take strength.

The Classical Source 11 September 2002