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Review: Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concert Hall

By william ruff

IF you put a Scandinavian conductor like Terje Mikkelsen in charge of a Russian orchestra, then it wouldn't be hard to predict Wednesday night's Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra programme. The high-temperature, red-blooded and heart-on-sleeve romanticism of Rachmaninov was tempered by the more austere beauty of Nordic composers Ole Olsen and Jean Sibelius.

Russian orchestras are justly famed for their rich sonorities and vivid tonal palette. Under Mikkelsen the [Moscow](#) musicians captured the dark side of Norse mythology in Olsen's Wild Hunt of Thor in which a ghostly formation of huntsmen is depicted crossing the skies – the sight of which invariably meant the direst of bad luck for anyone unfortunate to catch sight of them.

[Alena Baeva](#) was the soloist in Sibelius' Violin Concerto, strikingly eloquent right from the work's dark, lonely and icy opening. There was plenty of fire too in the concerto's more extrovertly brilliant moments (as in the thrillingly virtuosic finale) but it was Baeva's restrained, ethereal rendition of the opening movement that made the deepest impression.

Rachmaninov's 2nd Symphony has sometimes had a bad press: too much nostalgia and romantic yearning have sometimes been shrugged off as naïve sentimentality. But you would have to have a heart of ice not to be moved by a Russian orchestra playing with such conviction music which must have been pulsing through their blood vessels for so long. The rich orchestral colours and long, glorious melodies were there in abundance and earned for orchestra and conductor a huge audience ovation.

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