

## Orchestre de Paris Impresses On Tour in Switzerland



**Switzerland Dubugnon, Schumann and Shostakovich:** Orchestre de Paris, Khatia Buniatishvili (piano), Paavo Järvi (conductor), Tonhalle, Zurich 28.5.16. (JR)

**Dubugnon:** Caprice for Orchestra No. 2

**Schumann:** Piano Concerto

**Shostakovich:** Symphony No. 6

One forgets that the Orchestre de Paris is still a relatively young orchestra, having been founded in 1967, created by Charles Munch. Munch died soon after its creation and one Herbert von Karajan, no less, stepped in for a couple of years as an interim measure. Solti, Barenboim and Bychkov followed. Eschenbach came next, for ten years, and Paavo Järvi has been at the helm since 2010. His tenure is about to end, Daniel Harding is his replacement as from next season, with Thomas Hengelbrock as Principal Guest. The orchestra cuts a dash in their suave modern tenue, possibly designed by a famous Parisian couturier, though the men do look like a flock (or is it a mass?) of priests.

I heard Swiss composer Richard Dubugnon's first Caprice for Orchestra at another concert, also sponsored by Migros Kulturprozent Classics, back in October, when the Philharmonia (London) came to Switzerland. Migros aims to foster Swiss composers or soloists in almost every concert, not always an easy task I suspect. In the first caprice I heard nothing individual in Dubugnon's writing and jotted down names such as Stravinsky and Messaien as I listened. In No. 2 I added Bartók to the list. The work was not unpleasant in any way, but not especially modern, and therefore quite well received; the composer was present which always add to the length of applause. As the short work progressed (Migros had insisted the work should not exceed ten minutes), it improved in terms of interest, there was a loud climax with all six percussionists at full pelt, then a fast string passage, then a thud and it was all over. For Dubugnon, that seemed to be the hallmark of a caprice.

Don't confuse your Tishvilis: Lisa Batiashvili is the concert violinist, Khatia Buniatishvili is the concert pianist. Both young, both from Georgia. The critics appear to be divided on Miss Buniatishvili; whilst none deny her talent and virtuosity, some feel she takes too many artistic liberties as she deploys speed above all else. Some are reminded, as I was, of the young Martha Argerich. Whichever view you take, there is no denying that she makes a lasting impression. The first movement of the Schumann had to suffer Buniatishvili's idiosyncratic manner as she pulled about the tempi, not always in synch with the orchestra. The opening bars were explosive and made one sit up: her exuberant temperament was always to the fore, some passages were frighteningly fast, not always to the music's advantage. The last two movements were more successful. The orchestra (fine clarinet apart) blended into the background. Buniatishvili has been described as a "dervish of the keyboard", I cannot think of a better description. Some gentle Chopin calmed the nerves, by way of encore.

Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony has been effectively eclipsed by the popular Fifth (the "Soviet artist's reponse to just criticism") and the mighty Seventh (the "Leningrad" written in memory of the lengthy siege of the city by the Nazis). I suspect the main reason for its neglect in the concert hall is the complete absence of a traditional first movement, it launches straight into a bleak slow movement complete with eerie, melancholic woodwind, which does not usually warm any listener to a work. Järvi was visibly and audibly in his element, as an Estonian fully comprehending the effects of Soviet oppression. The *Largo* brings to mind the opening of the 11<sup>th</sup> Symphony, except that work explodes into a percussive onslaught. Symphony No. 6 has been aptly and ghoulishly described as a "headless rider". The symphony's second and third movements, a sparky *Scherzo* and a witty and quirky *Presto* contain much trade-mark

Shostakovich and are certainly entertaining but the work has no overwhelming qualities. It did give the orchestra the chance to shine though; there are no audible weaknesses in any section, though the humid evening (inside and outside the hall) gave the woodwind some trouble. (The hall will close next season, probably, for three years allowing for renovation to include new improved air-conditioning).

Paavo Järvi now moves on to concentrate on his new orchestra, the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Japan.

Everyone in the hall (including the members of the orchestra on the stage) enjoyed the encore: Shostakovich's "*Tahiti Trot*", the composer's orchestration of "Tea for Two" (from the musical "No, no, Nanette"). Apparently Shostakovich was sitting with Soviet conductor Nikolai Malko listening to a recording of the work. Malko bet Shostakovich 100 roubles (50 dollars) that Shostakovich couldn't orchestrate the song from memory in under an hour. Shostakovich took him up on the challenge and won – taking only 45 minutes. It's been a popular encore ever since.

***John Rhodes***