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New Generation Artists, Royal Albert Hall, London Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Cadogan Hall, London Jephtha/La voix humaine, Arcola Theatre, London

By Reviewed by Anna Picard

Radio 3 played matchmaker to the classical stars of the future, while Grimeborn made a triumphant return to Hackney

Sixteen pianists, 15 singers and nine string quartets. Seven cellists, six violinists, three viola players. Three trumpeters, two clarinetists, two flautists.

A percussionist, a harpsichordist, an oboist and one long weekend of 10th-birthday celebrations. Since 1999, Radio 3's New Generation Artists scheme has cherry-picked 70 young musicians from across the world, hot-housing them through a two-year programme of live broadcasts and new repertoire. Some ignite, some fizzle out. But with Paul Lewis, Alice Coote, Martin Frost, Cedric Tiberghien, Christopher Maltman, and the Jerusalem and Belcea Quartets among the alumni, the NGA curator Adam Gatehouse has a stronger record for talent-spotting than Simon Cowell.

Aside from Danjulo Ishizaka's incendiary performance of Kodály's Sonata for solo cello and Tai Murray's fearless account of Bartók's Sonata for solo violin, the most exciting music-making in the NGA's 12 mini-Proms came from ensembles. Meta4's playfully decorated reading of Haydn's String Quartet in D (Opus 20, No 4) launched a programme that included a collaboration with the Pavel Haas, Psophos and Royal String Quartets in Johannes Bernardus Van Bree's infectious Allegro for Four String Quartets, though none could rival the burnished tones of the Jerusalem Quartet's Haydn Opus 77, No 2.

This was a weekend of musical speed-dating. Andrew Kennedy and Jennifer Pike found common ground in Holst's Four Songs for Tenor and Violin but even the dullest of ears might have sensed that mezzo-soprano Daniela Lehner, pianist Shai Wosner and violist Antoine Tamestit had had little time to rehearse Brahms's Opus 91 Songs and even less agreement over how they should sound. A similar lack of stylistic unanimity dogged Alison Balsom's characterless Purcell with harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani, who sparkled in Martinu's Bach-in-a-blender trifle Promenades with Murray and flautist Emily Beynon. Delius's sun-dappled Cello Sonata brought Natalie Clein together with Tom Poster, while Steven Osborne and Alice Coote delivered a spellbindingly emotional interpretation of four songs from Das Knaben Wunderhorn. That this was the first time they had worked together was difficult to believe.

Emily Beynon returned to her day-job on Monday night, as principal flautist with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under Mariss Jansons (Prom 61). The phrase "orchestral musician", with its less-than-a-soloist implications, is meaningless in the verdant woodwind-writing of Sibelius's Symphony No 1 and the pointillist details of Ravel's Daphnis et Chloé, and doubly meaningless when applied to an orchestra in which Beynon plays with her equals, from clarinetist Jacques Meertens to leader Vesko Eschkenazy and timpanist Marinus Komst. Jansons is the most technically fluent, nourishing and lyrical of conductors, and though I miss a sense of danger in his performances with the Concertgebouw, their partnership is unfailingly satisfying. Magdalena Kozena's Citizen Kane moment aside (the voice is too small for Duparc's orchestrations), this was an exquisite

experience.

Up in Hackney, where the night air sizzles with the scent of beyti and lahmacun, Grimeborn entered the second week of its annual residence at the Arcola Theatre. New work dominates the programme, some of it already showcased in Tête à Tête's Riverside festival, jostling with low-budget stagings of Britten, Butterworth, Menotti and Poulenc, and an adaptation of Jephtha with a starring role for a rabbit named Elijah. Played out with little more than a map of Israel, some stock news footage, three cans of lager, Elijah and Elijah's fake-fur body-double, Ralph Bridle's deftly edited production of Handel's oratorio was a study of domestic dysfunction in which whey-faced Iphis (Tanya Cooling) and her weary mother, Storgé (Sandra Porter), are systematically infantilised.

The symbolism was heavy - a tailor's dummy for a god, children's building bricks as markers for bombing raids - and the singing uneven, but this was a taut, intelligent, artfully lit show, with some sensational playing from the young violinist Barbara Barros.

Alex Sutton's production of La voix humaine, with Merryn Gamba as the distraught heroine and pianist Jonathan Beatty as the orchestra, was similarly inventive, using three 1930s beauties as a silent chorus. With a top ticket price of £15, Grimeborn seems certain to become a fixture for opera-lovers who are curious about new talent, particularly those with a penchant for Turkish food.

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