

The City of Carlisle Orchestra were in great form on Saturday with their Winter Concert, taking us on a round trip starting and finishing in Bohemia and passing through the Russian steppes and the Caucasus. Conductor Leon Reimer gave a thoroughly clear and approachable pre-concert talk, inspiring the audience with his own enthusiasm for music from Slavic countries before a note was fired. And this was a take-no-prisoners concert. The wonderful Bartered Bride overture doesn't come off unless you can get a good dose of aggressiveness from every part in the strings and complement that with a lively and rhythmically sensitive wind-section and both qualities were there. In Balakirev's Overture on Three Russian Songs every section of the orchestra responded to the need for a warm lyrical tone, a delightful reminder of the composer's place as one of the architects of Russian-ness within Russian music. The first half ended with Borodin's Polovtsian Dances, a vigorous and sensitively presented trip down memory lane for those of us who grew up with 'Stranger in Paradise' (well done oboe and cor anglais!).

The focus of the evening was the rarely played Dvorak's Sixth Symphony (I think your reviewer turns out to have been the only member of the audience who had ever attended a live performance, when he played the third movement in his school orchestra in 1958). It is a seriously big work; every section of the orchestra has a huge amount to do and many exposed passages. And one can see why Leon Reimer expressed such fondness for it. There is lyrical Dvorak at the opening of the first movement, jagged Dvorak in the emphatic staccato string passages at the end of the exposition section, Bohemian Dvorak in the dramatic third movement... and so on. It was an impressive performance for its ensemble and for its solo work; orchestra and conductor were rewarded by loud acclamation at the end.

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