

April 27, 2015 6:04 pm

Janáček's Glagolitic Mass, Royal Festival Hall, London — review

Hannah Nepil [Author alerts](#) ▼

The brilliant, wildly original piece was performed with relish and meticulous attention to detail



The London Philharmonic Orchestra and choirs in Janáček's 'Glagolitic Mass'

Certain programmes function not as a cohesive package, but as an excuse to showcase one piece. This Royal Festival Hall concert was a case in point. The members of the London Philharmonic Orchestra looked thrilled to get the first half over with, so that they could move on to their final offering: Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* brought out the best in Czech conductor Tomáš Netopil, who, like the composer, hails from Moravia, and was brought up on Janáček's music.

Not that the other two pieces were a write-off. The Overture to Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* offered verve and gravitas. Beethoven's *Symphony No. 4* never wanted for grace or light-footedness. Both readings prioritised propulsion over bombast. Both demonstrated Netopil's ability to chisel elegant shapes out of the smallest melodic fragments. Neither had quite the bite nor sense of contrast to make these hard-



worked warhorses speak afresh. Particularly in comparison with the Mass, which sounded as good as new. What we heard was not the final draft of the piece, as heard at its 1928 Prague premiere. Instead Netopil used the reconstruction of the original score, recently re-edited by Jiří Zahrádka, in an attempt to capture what he calls “real Janáček”.



More

IN MUSIC

Un ballo in maschera,
Metropolitan Opera, New York

The Fall, Electric Brixton, London

London Symphony Orchestra,
Barbican, London

Liam Noble & Myra Melford,
Vortex Jazz Club, London

Sign up now

First **FT**

FirstFT is our new essential
daily email briefing of the best
stories from across the web

He succeeded: the result sounds more raw, more capricious, more proudly impractical than the heavily revised final version, particularly when performed, as here, with so much relish. The orchestra struck just the right balance between the earthy and the ethereal, building to climaxes of majestic power. The London Philharmonic Choir, Orfeo Català and Cor de Cambra del Palau de la Música Catalana paid meticulous attention to detail, savouring the rhythms of the Old Church Slavonic text. And the soloists wholeheartedly embraced the work’s primal spirit, most notably soprano Andrea Danková and organist Catherine Edwards, who fully deserved the audience’s roar of approval after blazing her way through her savage solo.

Occasionally the singers went overboard — tenor Kor-Jan Dusseljee sounded as if he might crack under the strain of his own ecstasy — but never enough to compromise the impact of this brilliant, life-enhancing, wildly original piece.

southbankcentre.co.uk

