

Review: Academy of St Olave's; St Olave's Church, Marygate, York

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By Martin Dreyer

York turns up plenty of unusual fare, but you hardly expect to hear on your own doorstep the British premiere of music written 200 years ago by one of the greats.

Schubert was probably only 14 when he made his first stab at writing a symphony. What survives are a mere 30 bars, though fully orchestrated. The Academy of St Olave's, rejuvenated under Alan George's direction, breathed life into them on Saturday, giving them twice for good measure.

They are recognisably by the master: a slow, portentous introduction, with three trombones lending considerable weight, followed by 19 bars of an Allegro dominated by strings, but with typical echoes in the woodwinds. If only... Brian Newbould has also done masterly work reassembling Schubert's Tenth Symphony and was on hand to introduce it.

The product of Schubert's last days (November 1828), it opens with a dancing theme, batted between high and low voices, before turning to a second tune, first heard in the cellos.

The sombre Andante, deeply reminiscent of Winterreise's hurdy-gurdy man, turns briefly to a heavenly melody in the strings, played here with great delicacy.

The concluding scherzo is more light-hearted, the strings jostling merrily with one another. It made a satisfying entity.

Earlier, Leslie McCormack was the agile soloist in Mozart's Third Horn Concerto, his confidence peaking in the finale after a smooth Romanza. Beethoven's Coriolan overture had been a crisp, controlled curtain-raiser. This orchestra has truly come of age.

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