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The Review: Academy of St Olave's / Alasdair Jamieson (conductor) with Keith Wright (organ) – St Olave's Church, York

9:40am Tuesday 27th January 2015

THE winter chill did not stave off a sizeable audience on Saturday, but it certainly dissuaded many of them from removing their coats.

Hitting the ground running in these conditions was always going to prove tricky, and Schumann's Overture, Scherzo and Finale suffered from an initial unease. But the players made up for lost ground, warming quickly to illuminate the triptych with an expressive and unified sound that packed a punch when required, taut woodwind section in particular.

Poulenc's abstract Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani provided a very different challenge, one the Academy eagerly embraced.

Organist Keith Wright conjured an absorbing array of colours from the St Olave's instrument. In tandem with the muscular anguish of the strings, he aurally transported us to a much bigger space, rendering Poulenc's angular textures with style.

After the interval, Haydn's Symphony No. 104 ('London') unfolded as a compelling journey through a performance that underlined the energy – often joyous, sometimes nervous – at the heart of the work. Guest conductor Alasdair Jamieson offered unwavering guidance but warmly entrusted wind players with the reigns of their own solos.

The expansive, lyrical lines of the Andante proved a highlight, momentary lapses in ensemble failing to mar a performance of sensitivity and delicacy.

Indeed, an askew drone that heralded the rustic verve of the finale also did not distract; the orchestra loyally pursued Haydn's every turn of phrase, dispatching the closing pages with uplifting zeal. And all in aid of a worthy cause: the DEC Ebola Appeal.

- Richard Powell

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