

THE PRESS

Review: The Academy of St Olave's, St Peter's School Memorial Hall, York, January 23

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By Robert Gammon

THE Academy of St Olave's conducted by Alan George presented their winter concert in a rearranged venue, after the closure of St Olave's Church for urgent roof repairs. A sizeable audience enjoyed an unusual combination of three important works.

For Bach's First Brandenburg Concerto most of the performers stood, emphasising its Baroque provenance. Rhythms in the first and third movements were foot-tappingly jaunty; the French horns contributed a pleasingly rustic hunting sonority. Violinist Claire Jowett and oboist Alexandra Nightingale interacted conversationally in the adagio solos, although the accompaniment lacked comparable responsiveness. For the fourth movement woodwind and strings alternated on each return of the minuet, lending variety and contrast.

Mendelssohn's depiction of mariners' despair while becalmed, in his youthful concert overture *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, sounded a bit complacent. But towards the end the sailors' exultation on sighting land was transmitted wholeheartedly.

Conducting from memory, Alan George drove Beethoven's Seventh Symphony purposefully in a performance that conveyed Beethoven's phenomenal inventiveness. Riveting from the start, the first movement's architecture was clear, the sound enthralling. The Allegretto second movement was nicely unsentimental, the duet passage between Lesley Schatzberger's clarinet and Les McCormack's horn artfully shaped. After a sure-footed scherzo, with the trio convincing at speed, Beethoven's boisterous finale built to a tumultuous close with absolute conviction. Any previous caveats about the dry acoustic, perhaps a result of the orchestra's relative unfamiliarity with the hall, were movingly swept away.

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