

Leipziger Volkszeitung (LVZ), March 4th, 2018

The world premiere of Strongylis's "Angels of Hope" conducted by Andris Nelsons, commemorating the 275th Anniversary of the Gewandhaus, Leipzig.

A sound-poem - a fine line of shimmering musical expression

A heartwarming performance of the first family concert by new composer, Aristides Strongylis', was conducted by the new Gewandhaus Music Director, Andris Nelsons, in only his second recent appearance in Leipzig. The piece, commissioned specially by the Gewandhaus Orchestra to commemorate this anniversary, provided an awe inspiring sense of occasion for this still relatively young composer (Strongylis was born in 1974). Once it was revealed that Andris Nelsons himself would conduct the premiere, this provided that extra mark of importance. But this was a family concert where children would be present, not as an exclusive group, of course, but as a vital element of the celebration - a great challenge for any composer and conductor.

For the music to engage the youngest members of the audience, it is a fine line between being too banal or being too ambitious and therefore misunderstood. The fine line, like a narrow ridge, allowing only a small range of musical expression, will at the same time, need to provide depth in its musical valleys to fully engage all of its audience.

Strongylis, who before the performance had had an on-stage relaxed and self-deprecating chat with the host of the concert, Arkona, about his life as a composer in Leipzig, brilliantly solved this challenge. Strongylis has the big breath for storytelling in sound. His sound-poem (after Rilke) is complex but understandable, full of feeling and sensual, shimmering and exotic yet romantically grounded. It provides the large orchestral gesture of understandable material, is rhythmically thrilling and exceptionally orchestrated. It's easy to compare music with "grand gestures" to film scores, but Strongylis' sounds need no screen. They make the pictures move in your mind.

Nelsons, who is conducting an astonishing number of concerts in these weeks, takes the score serious, develops magnificent sounds with the orchestra, marvelous melodies, liturgical incantations, gentle sweeps and provocative dances. The score doesn't care about schools or dogmas but, rather blatantly, aims straight at the listener's heart and soul, and not just of the children. And there is enough for the mind, too.

The colourfully attired, mixed audience shared the same feeling and applauded with all its collective hearts. Quite a few of the audience as indicated by the football scarves present in the cloakroom and including Andris Nelsons, were going afterwards to make their way from this thrilling stage to another performance at the RB Leipzig football stadium.

By Peter Korfmacher