

## *Vengerov and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic triumph*

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Audiences have had a long wait for the return of Maxim Vengerov. One of the world's greatest violinists, he hasn't been heard for several years due to health problems, conducting and teaching commitments. Even then his appearance with the St. Petersburg Philharmonic was by default, courtesy of Martha Argerich, who pulled out of a performance of Ravel's *Concerto in G* a few weeks ago.

Hardly surprisingly then that his first steps into Prokofiev's *First Violin concerto* proved a trifle inauspicious, the dashing virtuoso of old seemingly feeling his way into the swing of things. In the first movement the tone was less full, more lean, which somehow fitted with the more brittle passages of the grotesque second section but less with the "dreamy" opening part. The fiendishly difficult

pyrotechnics of the second movement scherzo were effortlessly negotiated though with wit, verve and not a little style; Temirkanov and the orchestra playing an admirable supporting role in allowing Vengerov to strut his stuff. Soloist and orchestra came together fully in the concluding finale where Vengerov's playing was at its most lyrical, quite rapt in its intensity and beautifully cushioned on a bed of woodwinds, leading to a sublime, dreamy coda.

A serene Bach *sarabande* was a fittingly restrained encore.

The orchestra came into its own for a resolute and deeply felt performance of Shostakovich's *7th symphony*. Often derided for the crude, banal war theme of the first movement, it has come to be more accepted as a major work in recent years. Those looking for a more "authentic" Russian sound may have been slightly disappointed here. There are fewer rough edges in this orchestra than in its previous incarnation, the Leningrad Philharmonic. There's more refinement, especially in the brass section, but the dark, deep hues of the strings remain; a unique sound which pays dividends especially in the almost meditative grief of the central adagio. True to form, this was a no fuss, steady-as-she-goes performance. Temirkanov let the music speak for itself, and in doing so unravelled layer after layer of emotion in the darker, inner movements, which the glowing, transparent



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**London, sábado, 24 de marzo de 2012.**  
Barbican Hall. Maxim Vengerov, violin. St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra. Yuri Temirkanov, conductor. Sergei Prokofiev, Violin Concerto No.1 in D major, Op.19. Dmitri Shostakovich, Symphony No.7 in C major, Op. 60, "Leningrad"

strings found full expression and colour. The outer movements were equally impressive. The long opening allegretto, with its repetitive battle theme was perfectly paced and superbly balanced; all sections perfectly audible in the fearsome tutti generated at the climax. The sense of struggle in the face of evil (Hitler's armies or Stalin's purges, or both) in the final movement generated thrilling tension, with not a hint of bombast or overblown triumphalism.

No encore was needed - or wanted, after the overwhelming barrage of sound heralding the final "Victory", but there was one - a composed and well paced "Nimrod" from Elgar's *Enigma Variations*.