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MUSIC

## LPO/Alsop, Royal Festival Hall, London

By Richard Fairman

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Although the activity surrounding the bicentenary of Chopin's birth has faded from view, there is plenty of other Polish music in the air. Polska! Year, the 12-month celebration of everything new and contemporary in the arts in Poland, is stretching its tentacles from Belfast to Glasgow, Nottingham to the Orkneys.



Powerfully atmospheric: Marin Alsop

This concert by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Marin Alsop, was to have featured the premiere of Henryk Górecki's Symphony No 4, but Górecki was taken ill before he could complete it. The new work was replaced by his Symphony No 3, entitled "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs", though at that point the tragic coincidence of the choice could not have been known.

The rest of the concert remained. An early glimpse at Mark-Anthony Turnage's eagerly awaited new opera *Anna Nicole*, based on the life of American model Anna Nicole Smith, was a draw in itself. His 10-minute orchestral piece *Texan Tenebrae* is powerfully atmospheric. The neon-lit brilliance of soprano saxophones and trumpets cuts through a night sky heavy with brooding strings.

In the middle came the first European performance of Philip Glass's Violin Concerto No 2. Asked for a modern equivalent of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, Glass has fashioned a four-movement concerto, interspersed with expressive cadenzas, though more specific parallels with Vivaldi's original are hard to find. Although each movement starts out with its own personality, they ultimately retreat to Glass's standard formula of endlessly repeating arpeggios. Pockets of music that have drama or feeling get dissolved into a pool of mechanical exercises. Robert McDuffie, the violinist who commissioned the concerto, was its wholehearted advocate here.

The performance of Górecki's Symphony No 3, with soprano Joanna Wos, was dedicated to those who died in the recent Polish plane crash. The symphony, such a popular hit in the 1990s, is music spun out of almost no ideas at all. Stranded in its empty expanses, the mind had all the time it needed for contemplation. (★★★★☆☆)

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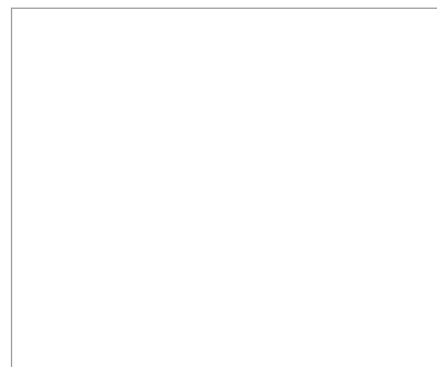
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