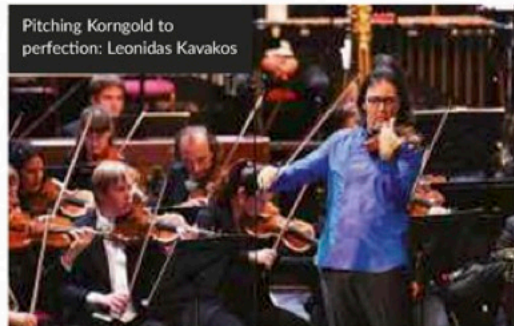


CONCERTS



Pitching Korngold to perfection: Leonidas Kavakos

without printed texts, how were we to know? Rather it was Kuusisto's own playing that decontextualised and dislodged the work from its usual, secure place in the firmament of soul-bearing, vibrato-heavy confessionals.

Rhythmically free and yet dynamically scrupulous, Kuusisto tied the solo writing back to an older definition of 'Romantic' expression – Schumann came often to mind – which would have fallen flat without Thomas Dausgaard's close moulding of the accompaniment. His encore of the Fourth Humoresque was both apt and original, throwing light back on to his treatment of the concerto's slow movement as a tender romance, warmed with the most delicate shades of vibrato.

Similar restraint from playing to the gallery – the Royal Albert Hall's capricious acoustic is much kinder to violinists than cellists – worked wonders for Leonidas Kavakos in the Violin Concerto by Korngold, much maligned for the tear-jerking schmaltz of the movies for which its main themes were first devised. I stand guilty as charged, but Kavakos talked beforehand about the influence of Strauss and Mahler on the score but, with the gossamer-fine support of the Vienna Philharmonic on top form behind him, Brahms in particular was a positive presence, lending unhackneyed charm as well as the impression of formal rigour to the concerto's first two movements. The big swooping intervals of the solo part were as much a key signature of the man who settled in Vienna as the prodigy who left it for Hollywood, and Kavakos pitched each one to perfection. His tone was lean compared with the likes of Shaham and Benedetti, but Korngold has written all the calories into the part – it needs no sugar-dusting – and the chaste radiance of Kavakos's performance issued a welcome reminder of Korngold's serious flirtation with Expressionism in works of the 1920s, such as the *Symphonic Serenade*, before the lure of Hollywood proved impossible to resist.

PETER QUANTRILL

BBC PROMS AT CADOGAN HALL
4: ARIS QUARTET
12 AUGUST 2019

CHRIS CHRISTODOULOU

BBC PROMS AT CADOGAN HALL

6: AMATIS PIANO TRIO

26 AUGUST 2019

The ensembles – both of which are BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists – championed women composers in their programmes. The Aris Quartet showcased a work by Maddalena Laura Sirmen (1745–1818). An early Classical composer, her F minor String Quartet was published in 1769, and its four movements are conceived on a larger scale than her other works.

The Aris Quartet gave an intelligent and well-voiced performance, and was particularly eloquent in the Largo. The unison passages in the faster movements were perhaps not quite so exacting in their delivery, but the players had an intuitive feel for the harmonic language. The rest of their recital offered better-known fare in the shape of Schubert's First String Quartet and Haydn's 'Sunrise' Quartet. The Aris certainly brought solidity to its performances of these works, and there was much attention to detail in its interpretations. But, of course, that's not enough. The quartet's earnest preparation needs a far wider dynamic range, but more importantly a broader concept of characterisation and emotion. Equally, particularly in the Schubert, the players could have afforded to breathe more in the phrasing.

The Amatis Trio elected to highlight the music of Clara Schumann in its programme. Better known for her prowess as a concert pianist, and as wife to Robert Schumann, Clara nevertheless was a highly talented composer in her own right. But to start this lunchtime recital, cellist Samuel Shepherd gave a masterful performance of Robert Schumann's Adagio and Allegro op.70. His bow control in the Adagio was quite stunning, while the Allegro was unbuttoned at full voltage, storm and passion to the fore, Mengjie Han partnering on the piano with real flair. Given the fact that Clara gave birth to eight children, it seems all the more remarkable that she managed to retain and hone her individuality and skills as a creative artist. The Amatis Trio were missionary in their zeal to reveal her qualities as a composer, giving a highly expressive performance of her Piano Trio in G minor op.17. The players' subtle phrasing, sharp characterisation and scrupulous ear for colour and nuance brought the invention into sharp relief. Clara had in fact been studying counterpoint quite intensely at the time, which is particularly reflected in the first movement, where brief glints of Bach adorn the writing. Elsewhere, the warm lyricism redolent of Robert Schumann percolates her melodic writing. Perhaps even more evocative are the Three Romances op.22 for violin and piano. These are subtle and captivating cameo pieces, very much in the romantic tradition, were performed here with spellbinding sensitivity by Lea Hausmann.

JOANNE TALBOT