

Henrik Halvarson

Mozart in Helsingborg, Sweden

Exquisite interaction with beautiful details

It is a shame that Helsingborg has become more and more of a backwater in the life of classical music because of economic restrictions. Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra no longer has the resources to pay the sky-high fees demanded by soloists and conductors as soon as they have advanced a bit upward in their careers.

It was therefore delightful that HSO succeeded in getting hold of the pianist Angela Hewitt before she soon is beyond economic reach. On the other hand I was surprised when I discovered that she was not going to play J.S. Bach, for whom she has become so well known and highly praised, but rather the ever present Mozart. But I shall be the last to complain. Angela Hewitt's interpretation of Mozart's D-minor concerto (no 20) was second to none. Hewitt focused on the small but expressive details as she chiseled the restless melancholic solo passages. Her unity of execution with HSO, and especially the wind instruments, was also of the highest chamber music class.

However, when the evening's conductor, Joseph Swensen, newly appointed chief conductor of the Malmö Opera, stood alone in front of the orchestra it was not fine tuned interpretation which was in focus. He had difficulty now and then, especially with the efforts of the wind instruments in particular, in getting them in a pleasant way to melt into his slowly growing interpretation of Sibelius' Symphony No. 5 and A Saga. Despite the fact that HSO's musicians are far from unfamiliar with this music, their contribution sounded insecure and hesitant. Add to this that Swensen's well studied final movement of the symphony sounded as if he didn't have the strength for the final chords, then the general impression becomes mixed.

But there were also some exciting moments in his interpretation and especially a fine feeling for the organic growth and paradoxical floating lightness in Sibelius' heavy sounding parts. The contrast between the aimless movement in A Saga and the striving towards the light in the fifth symphony was also very stimulating.