

Review: York Symphony Orchestra; Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, University of York

8:24am Wednesday 30th March 2011

By Martin Dreyer

Ever since Alasdair Jamieson took over as conductor five years ago, there has been a new spring in the step of this orchestra, which shows no sign of abating.

Saturday's programme – a Copland overture, a Sibelius suite, a Gershwin concerto and a Dvorak symphony – underlined the group's versatility.

Jamieson clearly enjoys a close rapport with his players. His firm, but unfussy style is equally engaging for his audience.

An Outdoor Overture is not Copland at his most ingratiating, and its raucous effect here was probably inevitable, even if rhythms were certainly punchy.

Sibelius' Karelia Suite was a good deal smoother.

The haunting theme of its Ballade gained extra poignancy from the cor anglais solo. There was a contrasting zest in the finale, sparked by the horns.

Kathryn Coombes was the idiomatic soloist in Gershwin's Rhapsody In Blue, a one-movement piano concerto in all but name.

She presented her early bars with deliberate caution, allowing the composer's gradually increasing intensity to have maximum effect. Her clarity was exemplary and her syncopation intoxicating. She is a find and deserves wider exposure.

Dvorak's Eighth Symphony may be something of a chestnut, but it did not sound hackneyed here.

It took time to take wing and the Adagio, though competent in detail, lacked shading.

But the lilting Allegretto paved the way for a finale in which the cellos dug into the main theme superbly – and the whole orchestra really caught fire.

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