

Review



François-Xavier Roth Conductor

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By Rian Evans, 28 October 2010

BBCNow/Roth

Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff

Following hot on the heels of their recent composer portrait of Swiss composer Michael Jarrell, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales focused on four Frenchmen in this concert. Under the baton of François-Xavier Roth, works spanning a period from 1998 to 2007 added vividly to a bigger picture of two generations of contemporary composers all but unknown over here.

In *Gris Cendre*, Jérôme Combier was inspired by Samuel Beckett's short novel *Lessness* to create an equally unorthodox and, by his own admission, baffling structure. Scalic rivulets and a metallic sheen offset the generally static, grey nature of his collage, making the eventual emergence of an insistent wooden knocking all the more ominous in its effect.

Phillippe Hurel's *Flash-Back* was a suitably energetic corrective to the Combier. Its vibrantly rhythmic definition was immediately striking, but the final gradual cranking-down of pace defied expectations of a long, fast ride. Gilbert Amy's *L'Espace du Souffle* was a similarly large-scale work, with fusillades of percussion – another French preoccupation – expertly delivered by the BBCNOW players. For Amy, his quotation of Bach in the opening was apparently significant; his use of dotted rhythms, like the so-called French Overture of Baroque times, was another backwards glance in an otherwise defiantly modern soundscape.

The work with greatest immediacy was that of Yves Chauris, at 30 the youngest of the four. His piano concerto ... *solitude, récif, étoile* ... is accompanied by just wind and percussion instruments. Brilliantly executed by soloist Jean-Frédéric Neuburger, it glittered and growled at the extremes of the keyboard and, in a final tryst with the soprano saxophone, fell still.