

FIRST NIGHT: CONCERT

Review: LSO Futures at the Barbican

The composer David Lang had 500 unaccompanied singers of all abilities marching around the foyers of the Barbican. The result was joyful

NEW

Neil Fisher

March 25 2019, 5:00pm, The Times



Simon Halsey conducts the public domain in the foyers of the Barbican

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This is what they mean by a maximalist minimalist. David Lang, whose music is often based on simple repeated refrains, also likes to work on very big canvases. So for the UK premiere of *the public domain* he conceived of 500 unaccompanied singers of all abilities marching around the foyers of the Barbican,

with 300 Londoners of all stripes (people who have never sung in public before) to get them ready to join the London Symphony Chorus and LSO Community Choir.

The result was joyful. Lang's text comes from a simple autocomplete search on Google, beginning: "One thing we all have is our . . ." As I stood in the teeming flood of singers, answers provided from high, low, around, behind and in front of me included "our love of music", "our free will", "our skin" and "our sandwich". The refrains from the multiple choirs — ten conductors were required to follow the chorus director, Simon Halsey — sometimes overlapped and sometimes clashed. The words are trite on paper, but they made a huge impact as they throbbed around the Barbican's brutalist nooks and crannies. In an age where "I" suddenly seems to matter more than "we", this herculean communal effort said loudly, clearly and non-politically that we are, in fact, better together.

What was Philippe Manoury saying with his 35-minute orchestral behemoth *Ring*? The composer said he wanted "to create a sound paradigm that has not yet been attempted". It's so nice to have goals, isn't it? Yet *Ring* didn't connect with its audience, even as the LSO players, split into multiple blocks around the Barbican Hall and heroically conducted by François-Xavier Roth, began giving this UK premiere before some had taken their seats. In a reverse of Lang's spatially diffuse piece, unfortunately, the effect of *Ring*'s very complex design was considerably less than the sum of its fiddly parts.

Tastier stuff followed. The world premiere of Donghoon Shin's *Kafka's Dream* shimmered and glimmered, offering a stylised kind of theatricality that's also the hallmark of the young South Korean's mentor, Unsuk Chin. It was moody and moreish. The final hurrah was Scriabin's purple-hued *Poem of Ecstasy*, beautifully controlled by Roth and the LSO's coruscating woodwind until David Elton's trumpet finally let rip and a flood of sound was unleashed.

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