

Maidstone Symphony Orchestra
Mote Hall
09 October 2021
Review by Susan Elkin

Rarely have I watched a performer who exuded as much palpable pleasure in the music as Mayumi Kanagawa playing Bruch's *First Violin Concerto*. She smiled several times at the leader during the piece and rocked appreciatively during the orchestral passages. Perhaps, since this was MSO's first concert for 20 months, she was as delighted to be playing live as the audience was to be there.

Technically pretty impeccable, Kanagawa gave us some fine cross string work and double stopping and, later, dug out lots of romantic richness in the *Allegro Moderato*. The orchestra, meanwhile, accompanied her warmly. I occasionally hear in colours and perceive G minor as a navy blue key. Kanagawa's simple dark blue outfit reflected that so perhaps she does too.

Her showstopper encore, Paganini's *The Hunt*, was very welcome icing on the cake. Played with expert insouciance and lots of colour, her flamboyant double stopping and "impossible" leaps certainly impressed this indifferent amateur violinist.

The concerto was sandwiched between an incisively dramatic account of Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture* and, after the interval, Mendelssohn's *Third Symphony "Scottish"*. I was pleased to note that Brian Wright took the whole symphony more or less *attacca* so that there was no space or temptation for audience applause between movements. It makes the work so much more cohesive than if it's chopped up.

Despite occasional fragments of raggedness, it resounded with melodious energy. The management of dynamics in the opening movement created a lot of lively interest and I liked the way Wright let the wind interjections, especially bassoon, shine through the texture. We were also treated to an elegantly understated second movement and as for the *Adagio* ... a conductor I was working under once commented: "This is one of the most sublime melodies ever written but you mustn't milk it". MSO didn't ... but I still had something in my eye at the end.

Yes, it's utterly brilliant to see MSO in action again. They still sit at separate stands which makes page turning difficult for string players and the distancing changes the sound slightly but it's hundreds of times better than the long, long silence we've all been through.