

MSO / 3 February 2024 / Mote Hall, Maidstone  
Review by Susan Elkin – [susanelkin.co.uk](http://susanelkin.co.uk)

It was a definitely a Big Works Night with batteries of percussion, double brass and harp all helping to nail MSO's vibrant, signature sound.

First up was Wagner's *Overture Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in which Brian Wright allowed us to enjoy all those majestic ralls, although the skill in playing Wagner well is also to deliver the contrasting lyrical passages with tenderness and there was plenty of that too along with exceptionally fine brass playing.

Then it was slightly reduced forces for Sibelius's 1904 *Violin Concerto*. It's one of the most challenging in the repertoire but Mathilde Milwidsky played it with her accustomed, focused charm. I've noticed the exceptional clarity of her playing before and here it shone creamily through the aching passion of the first movement, followed by that long *cadenza* and then some fine cross string work. Wright controlled the woodwind perfectly into the legato ending of the *adagio* and Milwidsky's rendering of the final *allegro* was both elegant and eloquent.

After that her *Adagio* from Bach's G minor sonata was a complete palate cleanser. I loved the silvery beauty of her perfectly placed double stopping and trills.

*Scheherazade* with its almost literally fabulous orchestration (bassoon over double bass pedal note at opening of second movement for example) is always a magnificent show stopper and this performance, full of power and grandiosity, was no exception. Highlights included the way Wright made sure we felt every yearning note of the violin and cello solos at the beginning, the excellent string playing in the third movement, George English's side drum playing and the brass fanfares in the fourth and then – lump in the throat stuff – the breathtaking balance of the final harmonic from the solo violin.

The huge round of applause saved for leader Andrew Laing was richly deserved in this concert. There is a lot of solo work in *Scheherazade* and he played with exquisite poignancy. Beautiful work indeed.