



Latin Fiesta! - Halle Orchestra
At The Bridgewater Hall , Manchester
Reviewed by Matthew Dougall July 2016

This is the world famous concert orchestra, Manchester-based Halle, romping, gambolling and partying. In a programme filled to the rafters with the popular contemporary rhythms of Central and South America, this really was a Latin fiesta!

Under the conducting of the rather lovely and personable **Stephen Bell**; who, even when allowing both himself and the orchestra to relax a little still has magnificent control over this

83-piece music-machine. However, tonight, the orchestra didn't take centre stage. They played only a handful of orchestral arrangements. In the main the spotlight was given over to four soloists who came along in party spirit to sing Lambada, Bossa Nova, Conga, Samba, Mambo, and everything else in between. The only one thing missing was tango!

First to take the mic was **Annie Skates** singing 'Sway'. **David Combes** then followed this with a song that sold 50 million copies when first released, 'Quando, Quando, Quando'. Following on from this, and the third of tonight's soloists took the stand;

Emer McParland

, to sing the rather beautiful and slower. 'Wave'. Bringing the pace back up a little was

Lance Ellington

, and his interpretation of 'Shake Senora'.

The evening continued in this vein. Each of the soloists taking turns at the spotlight, and the others filling in the vocal harmonies or acting as backing singers as and when necessary, whilst the orchestra filled out the sometimes rather sparse music.

The interesting thing is that none of the music in tonight's programme was originally written for a concert orchestra to play. Most were either written for piano and voice, or small studio or chamber bands, and so to hear these arrangements and the fuller orchestrations was really rather interesting. Some though, worked much better than others with this treatment. And one or two, for me at least, should have stayed small. The filling out of the soundscape did nothing to enhance but rather detracted. This though of course is a purely personal viewpoint.

The other thing which I found fascinating about this evening was that although I knew, or at least recognised, majority of the pieces played; I was unable to name any one composer. Indeed, like most popular music, it is the recording artist, not the composer, one remembers.

I absolutely applaud the idea of one of the world's top classical orchestras 'letting its hair down' and proving that they are fun-loving and 'normal' just like the rest of us. It's a wonderful way to engage with members of the public who wouldn't necessarily want to sit through a Beethoven symphony, and indeed the auditorium tonight was a lot fuller than I have seen it for some time with young and old standing in the aisles and in their seats dancing and swaying along to the music. It was a truly joyous occasion and well and truly blew the cobwebs away from the perhaps 'stuffy' image that many people conjure up when they think of the orchestra or the building.

However, I do have one slight problem with this. The Halle orchestra is not any orchestra, and they do have an image and reputation to uphold. It's a fabulous idea for them to 'dress down' or come in fancy dress, but there really does need to be some uniformity to it. Tonight we saw a variety of wigs, moustaches, sombreros, ponchos, football shirts, tango dancer costumes, shorts, in fact, anything which looked even vaguely like it belonged to Latin America was accounted for - even one musician dressed in a bright red parrot costume! It looked very haphazard and amateurish. If only there could have been some more control, to say, perhaps, everyone can wear red tops and black trousers and one accessory or something similar. The Halle orchestra still needs to preserve its dignity, and this was, for me, a step too far.

The music though was, as ever, superb. My orchestral highlights being the film music '**Welcome To Cuba**' and the opening piece to the second half,

The Soul Bossa Nova

which featured in a couple of films in the late 1960s but became known to a much wider audience as the theme to Austin Powers. The four soloists were all excellent and danced and swayed along to the music when not actually singing. Their second half costumes were lovely as they had all coordinated with each other and wore variations of glitter blues and purples and really looked like they belonged together. My personal favourite from them was a close harmony version of 'Perfidia'. This worked beautifully. I think the biggest crowd-pleaser this evening was

Lance Ellington

singing

Mambo No 5

, but for me, the highlight of the evening came in the form of

Emer McParland

singing the haunting and dramatic '

Jealousy

'.

All in all, a very enjoyable evening and highly entertaining. The four soloists were top-notch and the orchestra in party mood; leaving the audience applauding for more with a standing - no sorry - dancing ovation, as majority stood where they could and danced and sang along to Barry Manilow's 'Copacobana'.