

Berliners feel Elgar in their bones

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Staatskapelle Berlin

BBC Proms, Royal Albert Hall, London

★★★★★

Richard Fairman

It has been a political start to the BBC Proms this year. At the end of his second concert, Daniel Barenboim made a speech lamenting the drift toward isolationism around the world and calling on education to draw the diverse cultures of Europe together – “including you!”

Short pause for laughter. “And I am going to show you that I really mean it,” he added, and the Staatskapelle Berlin launched into a scintillating performance of Elgar’s *Pomp and Circumstance March No.1* that the Last Night of the Proms will be hard pushed to equal.

In the past few years Barenboim has taken up Elgar’s cause again, renewing a love for the music that started when he came to live in the UK more than 50 years ago. With his Berlin orchestra he has taken performances of the two symphonies to the major cities of Europe, and now at last to London.

These two Proms each ended with one of them. The first had opened with a cultured performance of Sibelius’s Violin Concerto with Lisa Batilashvili the articulate soloist. For the second, Barenboim brought with him *Deep Time* by Harrison Birtwistle, a BBC and Staatskapelle Berlin co-commission. Birtwistle’s fingerprints are all over this new work – the fascination with layers of time, the growling echoes of the distant past, the rhythmic tread of passing years, each as distinctive as ever, though they do not add up here with much cumulative power.

The main event was the Elgar. Barenboim says that his Berlin players, having worked hard to get Elgar’s style into their bones, now love the music. It certainly sounded that way from their

glowing playing in these two performances. Maybe the Symphony No.1 comes across on the portentous side in Barenboim’s hands. The performance of the Symphony No.2 was simply glorious, so free with the pulse that it was at once spacious and also passionate and headlong. These symphonies are part Brahms, part Wagner, part Strauss, and their place alongside those German masters has never seemed more convincing. Barenboim’s speech talked of a shared European culture. His Elgar made it real.

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POP

Frank Ocean

Lovebox Festival, Victoria Park, London

★★★★★

Tara Joshi

The headline slot at a festival is a potentially thankless task for an artist like Frank Ocean. The reclusive Californian, who rose to fame with rap collective Odd Future in 2010, makes meandering, quasi-R&B music that is inherently intimate – there’s something jarring about the idea of thousands yelling along to music so introspective.

Then there’s Ocean’s shy (albeit endearing) stage presence, his talk between songs punctuated with mumbly apologies. “Sorry if I’m not engaging enough,” he said to the Lovebox crowd. “I’m still trying to figure this out.”

Yet he had already exceeded the 50,000-strong audience’s more anxious expectations. Ocean is famed for a certain capriciousness – he followed up his 2012 debut album *Channel Orange* with a livestream of himself doing woodwork – and earlier this year cancelled gigs, citing production issues. When he failed to appear on time, ten-