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FIRST NIGHT REVIEW

Concert: MusicAeterna / Teodor Currentzis at the Festival Hall

The invigorating imagination and raw colours revealed in the ensemble's energetic playing of Romeo and Juliet left me wanting to hear more

Rebecca Franks

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an orchestra born in Siberia and now based in a city in the Ural foothills, arrived in the UK. MusicAeterna is the creation of the

energetic playing of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* left me wanting to hear more.

If Currentzis talks like a dreaming revolutionary, he conducts like a man possessed — dancing, stomping and sighing with abandon, turning this Shakespearean ballet into an earthy fairytale. His big late-Romantic-sized orchestra mostly stood to play, unleashing soloistic personality. It was all so alive, somehow, particularly in the bustle of the outdoor scenes. Perfection and precision may be goals for some musicians, but reflecting life in all its complex and imperfect glory seems far more interesting.

And Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, reordered and filleted here, requires this storyteller's touch. A pity the performance took a while to warm up — the rubato, particularly, felt calculated at first — but by the demises of Mercutio and Tybalt and the Act II finale, Currentzis had whipped up the excitement, acting out every deathly beat of the bass drum, letting the brass lament with bombast. Juliet's music had an airy innocence, while the strings found starry ecstasy in the outpourings of love.

The evening, in aid of Gift of Life to help Russian children with cancer, featured Ralph Fiennes, Vanessa Redgrave, Dina Korzun and Chulpan Khamatova reciting Shakespeare in English and Russian. A misjudged dual-language balcony scene aside (it was like listening to one side of two different telephone conversations), the selection of sonnets added welcome moments of reflection.

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