

that makes Fonda 500 so beguiling. And, of course, the fact that their frontman knows that a gimmick or two can go a long way.

Maddy Costa

Proms

Charismatic debut

BBC Philharmonic/Jarvi

Royal Albert Hall, London

★★★★★

Like father, like son, so they say. The Estonian-born conductor Paavo Jarvi — son of Neemi — has been causing a stir of late as the result of his performances with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Philharmonic, as well as a series of powerful recordings for Virgin Classics. A pupil of Leonard Bernstein, he has much of the latter's charisma and a similar ability to galvanise an orchestra into playing with furious intensity and bravura panache. This was his Proms debut, and a packed Albert Hall was buzzing with excitement before he even stepped on to the platform. Huge cheers greeted his appearance and what followed was outstanding.

His programme consisted of Beethoven's First Piano Concerto (with Lars Vogt as soloist) and Mahler's Sixth Symphony, both works subjected to a radical re-examination, their emotional content unforgettably exposed. Classicism slides into Romanticism in Beethoven's pivotal concerto. Jarvi and Vogt cover the widest stylistic and expressive range that I've ever heard in

the work, kicking off with skittish, Mozartian elegance rather than the usual militaristic stiffness, then deepening and darkening the music as they go. The weighty limpidity of Vogt's playing brings with it a sudden, shocking pre-echo of Chopinesque chromaticism in the slow movement. The Dionysiac elation of the finale peers forward to Beethoven's own Fourth Symphony, then further on to Brahms.

Jarvi's Mahler (like his father's) is powerhouse stuff, his version of the Sixth not so much a noble, tragic statement as a terrifying portrait of a world floundering on the edge of a void. The whole seems to reek of decay and rot. This is the last gasp of the Romantic revolution that Beethoven instigated. The symphony's so-called "motto theme", all pulverising brass and drums, first sneers at the rapturous emotions that surround it, then crushes them with ferocious brutality.

The ludicrous minuet that forms the central section of the scherzo comes over as an obscene memory of imperial Vienna in its glory days. There's no peace anywhere, not even in the slow movement; its central theme is riddled with chromatic unease and never quite follows the melodic contours you expect. An overwhelming achievement: one of the great conducting careers of the 21st century is now, unquestionably, under way.

Tim Ashley

★★★★★ Unmissable
★★★★ Recommended
★★★ Enjoyable
★★ Mediocre ★ Terrible