

## Festival Music review: BBC SSO, Usher Hall

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Arts Editor

Festival Music

BBC SSO

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four stars

THERE are innumerable ways in which the **Edinburgh** International Festival might have programmed a "70th Anniversary Celebration Concert", but this was as good as any. By definition a mixed bag, the ever-adaptable BBC Scottish and insatiably musically-curious conductor Martyn Brabbins were the ideal team for that task. Staffa, Ned Bigham's audio-visual collaboration with film artist Gerry Fox has little in common with the Three Interludes from *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* by Dmitri Shostakovich, but both made sense in this context. More impressively, the SSO played the latter between the similarly contrasting *Edinburgh Overture* of Arthur Bliss and the rather better known *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* of Vaughan Williams.

Most of this was linked by archive pictures and video footage, and some original interviews, compiled by Andrew Lockyer and narrated by Jamie MacDougall. That content included some genuinely funny moments, with Rudolph Bing's casual dismissal of Liverpool as any sort of cultural hot-spot a particular gem. Again, it was only one possible version of history, but the Vaughan Williams, and Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe Suite No 2* – which provided an opportunity to enjoy the playing of the SSO's new principal flute Charlotte Ashton – had both featured in the very first Festival in 1947, as had the *Emperor Waltz* of Johann Strauss II, which closed both that first programme and this concert.

For many in the audience, however, the highlight will have been the appearance of mezzo Karen Cargill remembering the contribution of Kathleen Ferrier to the 1951 Festival with Mahler's *Ruckert Lieder*. For me, it was her singing of "Um Mitternacht" in particular.