

Edinburgh International Festival Review: Orchestre symphonique de Montreal, 16 Aug (*****)

☒ People sitting in the front row of the Usher Hall's stalls must have been pleased that they brought their umbrellas and raincoats to the [Orchestre symphonique de Montreal's](#) first concert in the Edinburgh International Festival. Not only was it raining heavily outside, but there was a fair amount of water sloshing about inside the venue as well.

That was courtesy of Tan Dun's remarkable *Water Concerto*, which saw three soloists in front of the orchestra attacking miked-up perspex bowls of water with their hands, cups, tubes, cowbells and gongs in an astonishing work that combined sounds from the composer's Chinese heritage with Western avant-garde techniques. At first it seemed gimmicky, but it grew ever more enthralling as the piece progressed and the water sounds grew more complex. Wang Beibei, the main water soloist, delivered a highly theatrical performance, bringing a sense of ritual to her movements so that even the simplest gesture seemed to take on a mystical significance.

As the piece started, there were amused mutterings from the audience, but these were replaced by a rapt silence as the work progressed, and there was an ecstatic reaction after the piece's magical conclusion (anyone who experienced it will never think of a colander in the same way again).

It was a wild card to play, but it paid off in spades, and was by far the highlight of the evening. It's exactly the kind of unique spectacle that gives the International Festival its deserved reputation. Elsewhere, conductor Kent Nagano

continued the watery theme in a sumptuous reading of Debussy's *La mer*, with a gloriously glowing string sound and some gossamer textures in the middle movement, 'Jeux de vagues'. He finished with a strong account of Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony, that, while paying little attention to period authenticity, was rich in detail and drama, with a terrifying storm and a radiant, serene conclusion.