

# Review: RSN0 Naked Classics: Sibelius 5 (\*\*\*\*)



The Royal Scottish National Orchestra's Naked Classics series has a laudable aim: to pick apart a well-known classical piece and explain its inspiration and construction, and then to present a performance of the piece itself.

And it works surprisingly well – as the large audience for the examination of Sibelius's Fifth Symphony on Friday 18 November appreciated. It's pitched at just about the right level. There's enough there for music buffs not to feel bored – I was surprised, for example, that the RSN0 is unafraid to use sections of the musical score in its video projections, although the excerpts are described in approachable terms for anyone who doesn't read music. Classical novices certainly won't feel left out. There's plenty of background about the composer and the piece, what its sections might represent or mean, and insights into what it feels like to play the work.

Presenter Paul Rissmann is a genuinely engaging communicator, darting around the stage to get feedback from the orchestral players and coming up with striking images to bring the perhaps unfamiliar work alive. And he makes full use of all the resources available to him – the orchestra itself playing snippets from the symphony; video diagrams and images explaining the piece's workings; and even other music inspired by the symphony (in this case, a flagrant theft by 80s pop diva Sinitta).

For anyone new to the piece, it is a thorough and wide-ranging introduction that should help you feel less intimidated by an unfamiliar work. For anyone who knows it well, you'll maybe find a different perspective, or discover some details you

didn't know.

Christian Kluxen's performance in the concert's second half was at times a little hard-driven, but it teemed with telling detail and its climaxes were resonant and spacious. He worked the orchestra hard, setting the final movement off at a thrillingly breakneck pace and creating a mood of beguiling charm for the second movement's endless melodies.

**The RSN0's Naked Classics series returns with Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* (17 Feb 2012) and Mendelssohn's Symphony no.3 'Scottish' (27 Apr 2012), both at the [Usher Hall](#).**

Photo of Paul Rissman at a previous Naked Classics Concert by Tom Finnie