

# The Daily Telegraph

06 June 2011

Classical Music

**Rattle/Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra; Volodos, Dresden Festival, review**

## **Volodos's titanic performance of Liszt's B-minor Sonata was most impressive. Rattle: \* \* \* \* ; Volodos: \* \* \* \* \***

By Hugo Shirley

Since taking over as director in 2009, cellist Jan Vogler has rapidly helped to re-establish the venerable Dresden Festival on the musical map. This year's "Five Elements" theme looked to the Far East, but included celebrations of significant anniversaries. Mahler and Liszt therefore provided the focus for two high-profile concerts in the 19-day festival's final week.

Arcadi Volodos, a pianist heard all too rarely in the UK, presented a concentrated recital of Schubert and Liszt, supplemented by a generous clutch of encores.

Volodos's stage manner is unassuming, and gives little hint of the power he can unleash from an eight-foot Steinway. While he can summon thunder in the bass, though, he possesses the most delicate pianissimo, and commands every dynamic and colour in between.

His spacious Schubert – three Moments Musicaux and the early incomplete F-minor Sonata D.625 – was supremely musical and rhythmically alert. Skipping lightness was contrasted with forcefulness in the bolder rhetoric, while the sonata's juxtapositions were presented in all their bizarre glory.

It was a titanic performance of Liszt's B-minor Sonata, however, that was most impressive. Here the composer's demonic idealism was channelled into playing of Herculean strength and visionary contemplation. Others can provide more slender-fingered clarity, perhaps, but it's rare to hear this work performed to such shattering cumulative effect.

The "Tragic" Sixth has long been one of Simon Rattle's most successful Mahler symphonies, and so it proved here.

Once again, the sheer quality of the Berliners' playing was astonishing. The wind and brass solos were the stuff of dreams, while the violins' soaring lines in the Andante (placed second) were swoon-inducingly gorgeous.

The whole performance was masterfully controlled by Rattle, the massive finale in particular.

Yet although the precipice was in view, something kept us from any danger of toppling over. Amid the sonic splendour, technical precision and structural control, the crushing sense of tragedy at the work's heart didn't quite come across.