

## GUSTAVO DUDAMEL

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I am not yet a fan of Gustavo Dudamel or his Simon Bolivar Orchestra... When I heard that they were to appear at the Proms I knew that there would be a television broadcast. I was concerned.

Their Prom début in 2007 was said to be electrifying and the greatest Prom ever. They performed Shostakovich's Symphony no 10 and in another concert they donned colourful jackets and played some music by Latin American composers in which they stood up, sat down, shouted and twirled their instruments as if they were majorettes. They promenaded around the platform and waved their instruments in the air. Many thought this to be great fun while others thought it was wild, undisciplined and it was. It was certainly not faithful to the music. Many commentators said that this was cheap entertainment and it was tacky, and it was.

As to the Shostakovich, his performance was strange and often did not sound like Shostakovich. The long opening string section was played like lush Rachmaninov (there is nothing wrong with Rachmaninov, I hasten to add) whereas Shostakovich's music is of a different means of expression. In the serious passages Dudamel was grinning like a Cheshire cat which was most inappropriate. This is serious heart felt music. The third movement did not hang together; it was accentuated stop and start music. The conductor's exuberance was out of place.

On a positive note some of the orchestral soloists were quite superb and the finale was magnificent although the balance was wrong. Sometimes the double basses forgot this masterpiece was a serious and brilliant piece and half twirled their instruments.

Geoffrey Norris in the Telegraph on 10 August 2007 expressed his real concern for this conductor and his orchestra. Others complained about the lack of dignity and respect for this music.

I accept that Dudamel is an enthusiastic musician and has really done well with young musicians in Venezuela and made that country cultural. But where I have problems is that he and his orchestra do not adhere to the score and are often quite wild. Often his orchestra sounds like a big band with off-beat percussion and one expects Gene Kelly or Frank Sinatra to appear at any moment. In this, Dudamel cheapens music and one longs to hear music played as written without any trendy misdemeanours.

Apparently, Simon Rattle has commended this orchestra and its conductor, but he himself often performed his own versions of music departing from the score.

A half hour or so into Dudamel's performance of Mahler's Symphony no 2, the orchestra tuned up and received applause but this may have been because the soloists came on to the platform.

The choir sat through about 80 minutes before they entered with their singing, still seated. But Dudamel cannot be blamed for that.



There were terrible errors in this performance. The conductor brought in the soloists too early or too late; the Mahler experts, of which I am not one, complained about his tempi and lack of understanding of the music. Several others stated that this performance was the most awful performance since Barbirolli used to murder Mahler. In some of the semi-tragic moments, Dudamel inappropriate sickly grin and exuberance was at odds with the music. Someone said that if he were conducting Barber's Adagio for strings or Martinu's Memorial to Lidice he would still wear that stupid grin.

I have to say that that is a little over the top and possibly unfair but I can see what they mean.

There are positive things to say. Dudamel is a very pleasant man and generous to the musicians he has worked with. He loves his orchestra from Venezuela and they love him.



He has been described as an inspirational conductor. He has been 'snapped up' by orchestras but that is due to his popularity rather than his musicianship. Popularity can throw accuracy out of the window. It has been said that if Victor Borge appeared in a concert it would be a sell-out. He was a splendid funny man and was hilarious at the piano. Dudamel will fill concert halls and bring in substantial income for his employers and, in today's society, only money seems to matter. Dudamel is a bum on seats conductor.

I saw him conduct in Vienna. Tchaikovsky's Polonaise from Eugene Onegin was simply awful. The playing was decidedly rough and undisciplined. Sibelius's Finlandia lacked character; Debussy's La Mer was lost at sea. One renowned critic said it sounded like a German barbecue... again, a little unfair but understandable.

Dudamel was born in Venezuela on 26 January 1981 into a musical family. He had a prodigious talent and in later years won many prizes. He conducts the Gotheberg Symphony Orchestra and the Los Angeles Symphony orchestra as well as the Simon Bolivar Symphony orchestra of Venezuela. He married Eloisa Maturen and they have a son Martin Dudamel Maturen.

He has recorded many standard works such as Beethoven 3, 5 and 7, Mahler 5, Tchaikovsky 5, Nielsen 4 and 5, Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, Bruckner 9 and Dvorak 9. He has also performed Mozart's Don Giovanni at La Scala, Milan.

His Beethoven is variable. His Eroica is often magnificent but the outer movements are a shade too fast but the opening movement is electrifying. Is this the greatest symphony ever written? The symphony no 5 is strange being somewhat ramshackle and his facial expressions are worrying. I did not know there was about to be remake of Dracula, wrote one critic. That aside, he introduces unauthorised rituendos and the continuity of the music is lost. .

His conducting is clear and that is highly commendable but his flair and fancy does not produce great performances. His Dvorak 9 is enthusiastic rather than musical and it is this enthusiasm that leads him astray. Being young he lacks musical maturity. Listen or watch the great Rudolph Kempe in this symphony and with comparison you will see the difference.

People say he is the greatest conductor of our time and the Simon Bolivar orchestra is the greatest orchestra today. No, not so. Colin Davis at Beethoven and Sibelius is excellent. Reiner made the Chicago Symphony orchestra to be an orchestra at the very top. Ozawa transformed the Boston

Symphony Orchestra, Kempe made every orchestra he conducted to be a force to be reckoned with. Hugo Rignold did wonders with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra....pity his successors did not maintain those major improvements.

Dudamel has a phenomenal memory and a real love for music. With maturity and experience he could develop into being a fine conductor and I hope he achieves that. Music is not all fireworks and show. There are depths and profundities which should be sought even in the masterworks of Beethoven.

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