

### **A Last-minute Cancellation, a Stimulating End Result**

By Clive Paget, *Musical America*

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LONDON—What to do when the star is a no-show? This July 30 BBC Prom at London's Royal Albert Hall was to have featured Daniil Trifonov playing Mason Bates's Piano Concerto. Alas, the Russian pianist cancelled at perilously short notice citing visa issues (and not for the first time). Fortunately, Israeli violinist Vadim Gluzman more than made up for any disappointment, while the revised program had a cohesion that simply wasn't there in its original form.

The advent of movies opened a Pandora's box of opportunities for composers quick to embrace the new medium. Some, like Bernard Herrmann, found themselves defined by cinema, while others like Vaughan Williams and Korngold managed to dip in and out, mining their film scores to create symphonic works and concertos. This evening's bill of fare demonstrated just how permeable the membrane was between film and concert hall can be.



*Gustavo Gimeno conducts Vadim Gluzman in Korngold's Violin Concerto at the BBC Proms*

Herrmann was one of Hollywood's musical stars, and nowhere did he shine brighter than in his collaborations with Alfred Hitchcock. Among their masterpieces, the soundtrack to 1958's *Vertigo* combines a penetrating psychological sophistication with memorable tunes and technicolor orchestrations. This three-movement suite opens with a brief "Prelude," in which the insistent tick-tick of triangle and vibraphones pitch us into a whirl of doom-laden strings and snarling muted brass. Spanish conductor Gustavo Gimeno had the full measure of this haunting music, bringing out Herrmann's beguiling combination of ponderous terror and dangerous seductiveness.

The BBC Symphony Orchestra responded in spades, investing the music with impressive breadth and weight. This was especially effective in movement two, "The Nightmare," with its habanera rhythm stomping along to the accompaniment of tambourine and castanets. The music's echoing gongs and crushing discords take sinister to a whole new level before the lush calm of the concluding "Scène d'amour." Herrmann's love theme, a cross between *Tristan* and "Neptune" from *The Planets*, features a pair of harps that add to the swell and surge. Gimeno steered this aching

music through rapturous climax to post-coital payout.

Herrmann sometimes plundered his film scores for his less well-known “serious” works. Likewise, towards the end of his career, Erich Wolfgang Korngold poured themes from a string of hit movies into his late-Romantic Violin Concerto. Premiered in St. Louis by Jascha Heifetz in 1947, the work’s New York outing saddled the composer with the glib expression that would become a millstone around his neck: “more corn than gold.” With the concerto a crowd-pleasing repertoire piece these days, a listener now sees what a narrow-minded dismissal that was.

Gluzman, who recorded a marvelous account of the work for the Swedish label BIS back in 2010, demonstrated his mastery from the start, dominating the platform with his golden tone and command of the long lyrical line. His rich, warm, and generous sound (not a million miles from the work’s original soloist) soared above the orchestra in a first movement whose hummable themes derive from 1937’s *Another Dawn* and the 1939 Bette Davis vehicle, *Juarez*.



*Gustavo Gimeno, also music director of the Toronto Symphony and Luxembourg Philharmonic*

The second movement, “Romance,” is a radiant love song that taps 1936’s *Anthony Adverse*. Gluzman poured his heart out as he wandered through a heady landscape of harps, celesta, and vibes before frolicking his way through the more playful episodes. Gimeno and the orchestra captured the nocturnal mood to a tee before piling into a finale that owes its high jinks to 1937’s *The Prince and the Pauper*. Gluzman’s articulation here was as crisp as a head of young lettuce and he entered into the music’s rough and tumble with virtuoso abandon. Gimeno negotiated an orchestral balancing act to highlight the soloist’s nimble double-stopping and fiendish high trills before giving the horns their head for the work’s marvelously brazen Hollywood ending. Vintage stuff.

Prokofiev’s Third Symphony is also a case of borrowed clothes, a four-movement orchestral work derived from his unperformed (and for a long time considered unperformable) opera *The Fiery Angel*. Hearing it after a pair of works steeped in the world of film music, it was remarkable how cinematic it sounded—and how much less bothersome was the music’s lack of proper symphonic development.

The opening with its insistent ticking clock neatly recalled the start of Herrmann's *Vertigo Suite*, only Prokofiev is more direct, more brutal. The symphony is inclined to feel sprawling and a touch piecemeal, but Gimeno kept matters on a tight leash, crafting its architecture and bringing out the music's lyrical side. Controlling the more overtly aggressive sections, his thoughtful interpretation was easier to get a handle on than is sometimes the case. The martial, brass-soaked climax of the first movement, for example, was spirited, yet admirably clear and even surprisingly jolly.

The strangely cloying sentiment of the "Andante" was reminiscent of Herrmann and Hitchcock at their most wheedling. Conductor and orchestra found the music's sweet spot here, making the spooky glissandos and ominous bass drum taps all the eerier. The skeletal strings in the third movement were dispatched with an impressive dexterity, though the slashing interjections could have packed more of a punch. In the finale, gruff brass followed by wave upon wave of percussion created an uneasy sense of peril as Gimeno whipped up the turbulent vortex of sound towards its last hurrah.

A stimulating program, then, the happy result of pure misfortune.

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