

Fantastic voyage into the classical repertoire for young explorers

Prom 3

CBeebies: a Musical Trip to the Moon

Royal Albert Hall

★★★★★

By Robbie Collin

Most composers would balk at the thought of premiering their latest opus in front of an audience of around 2,500 under-sevens at 11.30am on a Sunday morning, accompanied by footage from the cartoon series *Go Jetters*. But Hans Zimmer is not most composers. The film score maestro was at the Royal Albert Hall yesterday for this year's CBeebies Prom, the centrepiece of which was the unveiling of his new short orchestral work *Earth*, which is meant to evoke a view of our planet from a lunar perspective.

For the CBeebies crowd, classical music can involve as much audience participation as panto – and indeed the troupe of familiar presenters on stage, led by channel stalwart Justin Fletcher, aka Mr Tumble, were positively encouraging it. But as the first bars of Zimmer swelled and swelled, children and adults alike were aurally bulldozed into deference. Heads turned. Mouths shut. Bottom-wriggling ceased. Wees that had been needed seconds earlier were suddenly needed no longer, as the Chineke! Orchestra, conducted by Kwamé Ryan, wove its bladder-cowing spell.

The piece began with a delicate French horn motif over a low string hum: sunrise squinting over a crater. This was passed around the orchestra, growing like the dawn, until it was taken up very movingly by the young voices of the inaugural CBeebies Prom Children's Choir, who performed in tandem with the BBC Singers, and whose vocals were pushed



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Pantomime spirit: the Prom included an appearance from Justin Fletcher, aka Mr Tumble

heavenwards by the Godzilla-like power of the Albert Hall organ, played by Nicholas Morris. Zimmer's music is splendid by nature – the 61-year-old German does his best film work with big-picture directors such as Ridley Scott and Christopher Nolan – but even in a child-sized portion, it has a grandeur that throbs in your chest.

The Zimmer premiere was the indisputable highlight of a generally well-pitched and spirited programme, which scattered a few horizon-broadeners among kid-concert standards from Handel, Puccini and Britten. In line with the Apollo 11 anniversary, the theme was "Off to the Moon", and a loose space-travel storyline strung everything together, with each section of the orchestra providing a valuable resource for the mission (brass was bravery, percussion power, and so on). This entailed a well-received cameo, with live slide whistle, from the Clangers – who, like

the moon landing, are celebrating their half-centenary – and also an enormous space rocket that rose up from the middle of the arena at a pivotal moment, engulfing the Promenaders in a cloud of dry ice.

Alongside the likes of that, it was inevitable that some of the pieces would struggle to connect. I loved the Gershwinian shimmer of Jessie Montgomery's *Starburst*, but my boys, aged six and four, were rather less enthralled. But they perked up considerably for the penultimate item: a medley of CBeebies favourites arranged by Iain Farrington. You haven't really heard the *Hey Duggee* theme tune until you've heard it played by a classical symphony orchestra.

The CBeebies Prom is repeated this morning at the Royal Albert Hall at 11am. Tickets: 020 7070 4441; bbc.co.uk/proms

