

A short interval for the hardened rock fans to grab an ice cream, and then Jon Lord's Concerto for Group and Orchestra. Soloists: Jon Lord (organ), Miles Bould (percussion), Roger Glover (bass guitar), Chester Kamen (guitar) and Andy Cane (voice). Introduced by a few words from the composer to explain the thoughts behind the piece.

This is the fourth time I've seen the Concerto live, but the first time I've seen it without Deep Purple as the soloists. Would it stand as a piece of music without the magic of the greatest rock band in the world to prop it up?

...yes.

This is my favourite piece of classical music. Not because of Deep Purple. Just because... it's so good. Take the band away and the orchestral tunes stand on their own as a tremendous piece of 20th-century English music. (Although the programme notes tell me that the introduction shows a Sibellian influence. It's a connection I had never consciously made, but I think it's no coincidence that the composer I love above all others is Jean Sibelius.)

And then you add a rock band. A Hammond organ – Jon Lord playing a Hammond organ – is the most beautiful sound I know and I'm reduced instantly to tears the moment it leads the band in to kick the orchestra aside. And in the slow movement' when the band and orchestra are meshing in harmony... there's a moment there where a simple organ tune is echoed by the flute... that's just one of the most perfect moments in the whole of music.

All of the soloists perform well. Chester Kamen (playing a Les Paul) plays the group parts as scored and then when it comes to his solos he improvises freely. And that's exactly how it should be played. And he's a very impressive player, technically excellent and with great feeling. The Les Paul sound also fits the Concerto really well (surprise!)

Miles Bould is the star of the show. His final-movement cadenza is thunderous and incredibly fast. He really is phenomenal and his solo gets spontaneous applause – yes, I know you're not supposed to, but what can you do? I'm surprised the crowd stayed in its seats (I almost didn't).

Andy Cane sang well for his brief appearance in the second movement, emulating Ian Gillan's classic tone surprising closely. (I wonder what his screams are like?)

Roger Glover is... well, you all know what Roger Glover is. He's the best-sounding bass player in the world and is as solid as ever. And I think he had a new bandana for the occasion.

The sound in the hall was glorious, the balance between the band and orchestra perfect. They didn't over-amplify the band, so the orchestra's natural sound cut cleanly through when it needed to, and this had the consequence that the crashing parts REALLY crashed, the drums were thunderous in the finale, and the energy topped even that of the 6th symphony (and I think Paul Mann was on the verge of taking off completely at times). The whole thing sounded more smooth and clean and polished and clean than any other version I've heard. And I've heard a lot of them...

And with a huge crash, the end. Standing ovations; bows; no encore. There was no encore that could follow that.

Best piece of music ever. Amazing orchestra and band. Perfect end to an excellent day.

Best concert I've ever seen.

I don't know how else to describe how good it was. The best compliment I can give anything is: as good as a Deep Purple concert.

That good.

David, it's great, as always, to read your intelligent and perceptive comments. I just thought I'd let everyone know that the drummer was not Miles Bould, but Elliot Henshaw who replaced Miles at the last moment, and did an absolutely stunning job. Not only did he learn the piece in just a couple of days, but his third movement solo had all our jaws on the floor (even those in the orchestra for whom it might have been a bit loud!)

Needless to say, it was a great joy for me to conduct the concerto again, particularly with the RPO, who not only played fantastically well, but brought a great attitude to the whole thing. I just wish Sir Malcolm could have been there to hear it.

Wonderful to play with Roger again, and of course with Jon - greatest of artists and dearest of friends.

Great to meet those of you who waited for us at the stage door afterwards, and a special thank-you to all who made the trip specially.

Looking forward to the next time.

All the best as always,
Paul Mann