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## Review: Mozart in the City

Sam Olliver  
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**Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**City Hall Concert Hall**  
**Reviewed: June 26**

There are few composers whose instrumental works can raise smiles like those of Franz Joseph Haydn - in the right hands, that is.

Nicholas McGegan's joyous direction of Haydn's Symphonies 59 and 85 and the overture to *L'Isola Disabitata* was less of an interpretation, more of a direct plug-in to the spirited wit and charm of the age. It's rare to leave a concert hall feeling the composer's presence must have been sitting on the edge of the stage, nodding in approval, but this was one such occasion.

The players' body language suggested they were not comfortable with McGegan's eccentricity on the podium, the exception being guest concert master Ruggero Alliffranchini who shadowed his every whim. The music that spilled from their instruments, however, was a tour de force of impeccable entertainment.

There are no highlights; just a parade of well-balanced, tastefully articulated lyricisms. Haydn's repeated passages can find listeners glancing at their watches, but there was simply pleasure at hearing again how McGegan had decorated the porcelain the first time round. The fluffs from the horns were regrettable.

A family crisis kept Isabelle Faust from playing Mozart's Violin Concerto No4, giving Andrew Simon just a few hours to dust down his basset horn for a substitute performance of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. Simon is the Philharmonic's principal clarinetist and had all the needed qualities for the solo spot: perfect intonation, faultless lines and a creamy tone throughout the instrument's range.