

The Herald

Messiah, Glasgow, Royal Concert Hall

Music

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Glasgow
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It's a fact of musical life that conductor Nicholas McGegan, pictured, is a wizard. He can make music soar in apparent defiance of gravity. But how on earth did he work that one with Handel's Messiah and the RSNO, its chorus and a distinguished team of soloists on Friday?

Why did it appear so short? Yes, there were a few cuts, but it pretty much ran at its normal duration. And though McGegan can make music sprint, it wasn't even that fast, and certainly not as fast as I've heard him take it. Indeed, the word "broad" peppers my notes.

So with what sleight-of-hand did the rather impish, bouncy character make this Messiah appear so concise, so brief, so swift in its progress, and yet so expressive, so lovingly enhanced by the magical singing of soprano Lorna Anderson, mezzo Diana Moore, who, after a tremulous start, was clearly having the time of her life, and the two glorious voices of tenor James Gilchrist and baritone Roderick Williams?

My impression is that McGegan is a master of deception. What he was controlling on Friday, consciously or otherwise, was one's perception of the passing of time. When the music flowed slowly - and I can't recall when I last heard Comfort Ye as lusciously and spaciously unfolded as it was by Gilchrist - it nonetheless flowed seamlessly.

The faster the music became, the lighter was McGegan's touch, with lots of detached notes, scrupulously-placed accents to articulate pulse and rhythm, and a delivery at high speed that was pristine in its clarity. Nothing was exaggerated; everything was intimate and understated. It winged by and, quite exceptionally, was a genuinely enthralling Messiah.

12:01am Monday 5th January 2009

By *MICHAEL TUMELTY, Music Critic*

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