

Don't all cough at once

The great Korean violinist Kyung Wha Chung made a long-awaited return that some may never forget...

Fiona Maddocks



Kyung Wha Chung

Royal Festival Hall, London SE1

Huddersfield contemporary music festival

Panufnik at 100

Kings Place, London N1

Laughter in the concert hall, as in all life, takes many forms. Given that music is not generally comic, chuckles tend to be empathetic rather than uproarious: a recalcitrant piano moved into place; a stage hand mistaken for the conductor or, on rare occasion and not always easy to spot, the music itself making a melodic, harmonic or rhythmic joke. When that laughter occurs between movements of an intimate chamber piece and the performer on stage looks daggers, the impact is mortifying.



Not amused... Kyung Wha Chung after the interval (and costume change) playing Bach at the Royal Festival Hall last week. ICA Films

since toured China, Japan and South Korea. This was her return to Europe.

Large advertisements on the underground indicated an expensive campaign was afoot to fill the Royal Festival Hall, where Chung made her UK debut in 1970 with the LSO conducted by André Previn. At that time, Daniel Barenboim, boyishly electrifying pianist and conductor, and the cellist Jacqueline du Pré, one of the few female stars on the scene, were music's golden couple. Ida Haendel (b1928) was virtually

pianist Kevin Kenner. The programme, ranging from Bach to Franck, would have been ideal next door in the Queen Elizabeth Hall (capacity 900). No one need wonder why she, or her management, chose the bigger venue.

Taking time to wipe her hands and adjust her music when she walked on stage, Chung looked glamorous in black but stern in expression. The Festival Hall acoustic, overhauled since her last appearance, plays tricks. It is at once livelier and less predictable. In such a big space the

D minor, needs context. Here it was heart without matter, not helped by a few intonation slips and awkward finger shifts. César Franck's Sonata was fluent and warm.

Applause was generous. Encores and CD signings followed. Chung remains a magnificent artist. She aims for the highest, and asks that of her audience. Can it be right, though, to leave us so uncomfortably aware of her mood that the rest of the concert becomes a matter of near indifference? I was so nervous I swallowed an entire

Kyung Wha Chung's Royal Festival Hall concert on Tuesday, following performances in Liverpool and Perth, was billed as the comeback of a legend, a heavy yoke for anyone. The Seoul-born Korean violinist, now 66, last played in London 12 years ago. The combination of bringing up her two sons, and a hand injury in 2005 explains her absence. She returned to the Asian stage four years ago and has

the only well-known female violinist. The arrival of a beautiful young Asian virtuoso whose playing was – and still is – aristocratic and refined, fiery and nimble, caused a sensation.

In advance of last week's concert I suppressed anxieties about why she had chosen to return to the Festival Hall (capacity 2,500) not as soloist with orchestra but in a duo recital with the accomplished American

violin has a restrained voice, even as distinguished an instrument as the 1735 Guarneri played by Chung. Every dropped programme, cleared throat or mistakenly kicked plastic bottle sounded like gunshot.

Chung opened with Mozart's G major sonata K379. The first movement was tense and a little unsteady. Perhaps her concentration, of which she has spoken in interviews, had not yet focused; understandable in the circumstances. The opening work is a settling time for the audience too, coming in from the cold, clearing throats and minds. The end of the movement is the natural place to cough.

At first one lone person took the opportunity, then most of the hall.

throat sweet and choked all the more explosively. I left feeling chided and hot in the face, sympathetic to that child who may never want to go to a concert again, and longing for a good cough.

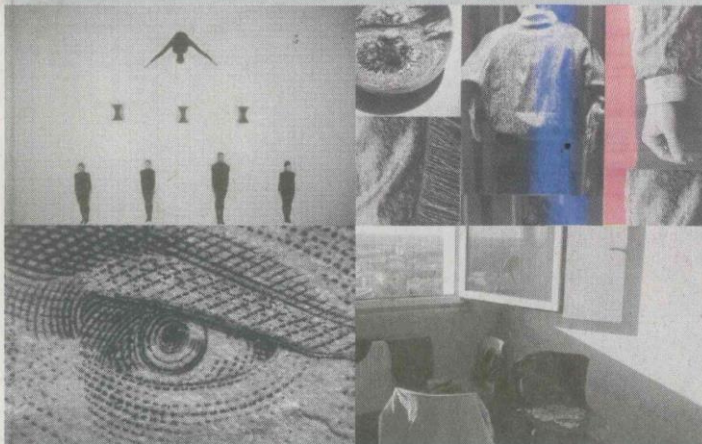
The rest of the week included an array of new music, which here may read like a list but in reality sharpened ears and brain. In the closing days of **Huddersfield contemporary music festival**, Apartment House joyously and knowingly reinvented Brian Eno's 1975 album *Another Green World*. The contrabass clarinetist Gareth Davis brilliantly interpreted Elliott Sharp's multimedia work *Sylva Sylvarum*, in which 250 images were sequenced and layered with satellite videos of the earth. The results were spectacular.

The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (conductor Steven Schick) gave an assured world premiere of *Physis I & II* by the featured composer James Dillon (b1950) – gradually achieving in the UK the recognition for his explorations of complexity long appreciated in Europe. Noriko Kawai was a precise and perceptive piano soloist in *Andromeda* (2006). The Catalan composer Hèctor Parra (b1976) made a bold impression with his vivid *L'absència* (2013). With ticket sales averaging 90%, this was a triumphant festival.

Panufnik at 100 at Kings Place, London celebrated the centenary of the birth of Andrzej Panufnik. The Brodsky Quartet, with Robert Smissen, viola, and Richard May, cello, played chamber music including Panufnik's exquisite *Song to the Virgin* sextet, as well as two London premieres, spirited and direct, by his daughter Roxanna Panufnik (b1968).

At the **British composer awards 2014**, nine first-timers won, including three women. Kerry Andrew carried off two awards out of the 13. It's hard. You don't earn much. It's a struggle to get an audience. Yet with awards such as these and events like Huddersfield, to be a composer in Britain today is to be part of a vigorous, lively world.


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
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Then, just as all seemed quiet, a new bronchitic wave started across the auditorium, to genial laughter. Chung did not join in. Nor did she smile. She waited. Out of the new silence, a child coughed. Chung, who began playing the violin aged six, stared up, located child and parent and appeared to say: "Maybe bring her back when she's older." Then the performance resumed. Embarrassment roared noiselessly through the auditorium.

This might seem a long meander over a bit of coughing. It raised a key question about the relationship between artist and audience, payee and payer. Chung gave a fine recital, with a ferocious and poetic performance of Prokofiev's Sonata No 1. The decision to play Bach's Chaconne was less happy. This work of genius, from the Partita No 2 in



Albion Media

6 Flitcroft Street, London WC2H 8DJ

T +44 (0)20 3077 4930

www.albion-media.com