

**Maidstone Symphony Orchestra**  
**Brian Wright conductor**  
**Ben Goldscheider horn**  
**Mote Hall, Maidstone / 1 February 2025**

Review by Susan Elkin – [susanelkin.co.uk](http://susanelkin.co.uk)

This imaginatively programmed concert gave us three mid-twentieth century works all premiered within four years of each other, under very different circumstances, so there was plenty of range to appreciate.

Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* overture is an extravagantly exciting piece and a challenging concert opener because it has to go fast and furious to be as exhilarating as it's meant to be. Wright steered the orchestra through all those off-beat rhythms and lush melodies with panache and all praise to piccolo player Angela Love both here and in the two following works. She was kept pretty busy throughout the evening.

We're very used to the horn concerti of Mozart and Strauss – but what about Reinhold Glière who was a contemporary of Rachmaninov and whose concerto is pleasingly tuneful? It should get far more outings. Soloist Ben Goldscheider, whose poised control is remarkable, found soulful legato in the long phrases of the first movement and some unusual sounds across three and a half octaves in the cadenza. The *Andante* is a bit syrupy and could be mistaken for film music but Wright ran with its excesses and the blending of horn (rich and creamy sound, here) and strings was nicely balanced. The third movement is shot through with Russian folk melodies including a tune I know as "London Bridge is Falling Down". Goldscheider played every note with crisp clarity in what was a very enjoyable performance of a piece new, I presume, to most of the audience.

And so to the brooding majesty of Shostakovich's classically structured, and vast, *Tenth Symphony* written soon after (and maybe to commemorate) the death of Stalin. It's not a piece many community orchestras would have the courage to tackle but MSO carried it off from the escalating, lugubrious angst of the opening with the plaintive brass all the way to the rousing final bars with their astonishing, bravura timp work. And at a practical level it must have been satisfying for the orchestra to rehearse and perform because there's so much for everyone to do.

High spots included the unsettling violin pizzicato with flute and the growling contra bassoon in the first movement and the strident, aggressive energy of the second movement which – the composer was coy about it – may be a representation of Stalin. There was some pretty arresting playing in the *Allegretto* with that disturbing recurrent motif and full marks to Andrew Laing for dynamic leadership, especially in this movement. Then the peaceful resolution and triumphant brightness in the *finale* were communicated fully especially by the brass and percussion sections.

I was pleased to see a slightly fuller hall than sometimes for what turned out to be an interesting and enterprising concert.