

A brilliant new horn concerto to welcome the Solstice, plus the best of June's classical and jazz concerts

The premiere of Brian Elias's piece was a highlight of a typically energetic and enjoyable evening at the Aldeburgh Festival

[Ivan Hewett](#)

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Horn soloist Ben Goldscheider Credit: Britten Pears Arts

BBC Symphony Orchestra/Aldeburgh Festival,
Aldeburgh ★★★★★

The Aldeburgh Festival offers so much concentrated musical nourishment it can actually be overwhelming. June 22 was a typically rich day, with a tribute to great German singer Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau from his young disciple Benjamin Appl, and a late-evening celebration of English folk-song from Sam Lee to celebrate the summer solstice.

In between came a concert of amazing vividness from the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which featured a brand new horn concerto of teasing mystery from 70-something British composer Brian Elias, and a song-cycle of nose-thumbing verbal and musical brilliance from one of the great partnerships in English music: W H Auden and Benjamin Britten.

The evening kicked off with a five-minute palate-cleanser in the shape of Night Songs, composed by the Scottish composer Helen Grime back in 2012. Its wispy cloud-trails of melody and seductively sinister crepitations in harp and strings cast a brief spell, but Elias's new Horn Concerto was on a different level of complication. It hurried into being with restless energy, soon brutally interrupted by sudden stillness, the horn's lonely melody threaded through a forest of dark harmonies.

These were the first steps into an enjoyably complex labyrinth in which the music would often turn a corner unexpectedly and give us the same view we saw ten minutes previously, but from a different angle. The soloist Ben Goldscheider was simply astounding, darting between all these moods with perfect, unflappable virtuosity. It was extraordinary to hear how many musical personalities the horn could take on: stony grandeur, lyrical sweetness, scampering energy. Elias's new concerto was altogether wonderful, and deserved far more applause than it received.

By comparison with that restless shape-shifting, those satirical songs were all blazing clarity. Auden's facetiously clever text satirises the British upper class's fondness for animals, and their casual racism and antisemitism (that reference felt especially raw at this present moment). It was like listening to a revue sketch by two over-clever Oxbridge undergraduates; you sensed they weren't quite sure what their target was, but they were going to satirise it anyway.

Britten's musical setting responded to Auden's words with a score of cartoonish vividness, played here by the BBC SO under its chief conductor Sakari Oramo with uproarious energy. But even they were put in the shade by tenor Allan Clayton. He projected Auden's words with what can only be described as heroic

vigour, and yet somehow found a surprising vein of pathos underneath all the high jinks.

Finally the BBC SO sent us out into the Suffolk sunset with a performance of Sibelius Fifth Symphony that was daringly original, Oramo stretching and pulling the tempos so one felt the music's vast tectonic plates shifting and grinding under the bright surface. There are still plenty of good things to come in the Aldeburgh Festival's final week, including a celebration of the great German singer Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau on Tuesday and the BBC Singers on June 26. And if you can't make it in person, catch star American violinist Leila Josefowicz and friends on BBC Radio 3 on June 25.

Hear this concert on BBC Radio 3 on 24 June and for 30 days thereafter on BBC Sounds. The Aldeburgh Festival continues until 29 June: brittenpearsarts.org