

From Dark till Dawn review — the Proms party all night

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★★★★★

It was the best bargain in London: £8 for a night's lodging in Kensington, even if you did have to share the room with a few thousand other people, some very wide-awake musicians and a giant organ played flat out. This was the all-night Prom, giving punters live performances from 11pm to 7am with a couple of intervals — sadly alcohol-free after 1am, which wouldn't have pleased a lot of the composers featured.

That apart, it was gloriously entertaining stuff — relaxed in mood yet with classy music-making. Anna Lapwood curated it, initially setting the wild echoes flying with a chunk of Hans Zimmer on the Royal Albert Hall's mighty Willis organ, and then conducting a choral segment later on.

Yet for once the TikTok organist was upstaged. As the clock ticked past midnight the irrepressible Norwegian collective Barokksolistene, making their Proms debut, had the audience cheering, laughing, singing along and even skipping a light fandango in the arena. The Norwegians are a brilliantly organised bunch, yet give the illusion of freely improvising

on the entire gamut of north European folk music, while also supplying very Scandinavian humour, exuberant dancing and haunting quieter numbers. If I were running the BBC I would book them for the Last Night of the Proms — they would put some pep into *Rule, Britannia!*.

I felt sorry for the Pembroke College Chapel Choir, having to follow that. But under the direction of Lapwood (in her final concert as the choir's director) the Cambridge students sang beautifully, even if they needed more variety. All the pieces not written by Eric Whitacre sounded as if they were. Happily the Pembroke choir reappeared to add mellifluous backing to the tender melodies of the Chicago singer-songwriter Sleeping at Last, who aptly ended the show.

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Before that, some unforgettable moments. After an epic set including Liszt's terrifying arrangement of Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre* and two transfigured Radiohead songs, the young Japanese pianist Hayato Sumino delivered Ravel's *Boléro* on two pianos (grand and upright), sometimes simultaneously. It had to be seen to be believed. A characterful Russian cellist, Anastasia Kobekina, also ranged virtuosically across western music — well, from Hildegard of Bingen to Jonny Greenwood.

The enterprising 12 Ensemble played no fewer than four Proms premieres (by Edmund Finnis, Isabella Gellis, Oliver Leith and Oliver Coates) demonstrating how British composers are imaginatively reinventing the string orchestra. And the Senegalese star Seckou Keita welcomed the dawn in impeccable voice, his kora producing delicate miracles of invention.

To everyone's surprise the audience was not much smaller at breakfast time than it had been at midnight. A new Proms tradition has been born.

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