

Celebrating a great in style

David Winskill reports from the Barbican, where the Crouch End Festival Chorus weaved a narrative celebrating the 100th birthday of Leonard Bernstein

★★★★

It was an inspired piece of programming that knotted together the four pieces of music performed by Crouch End Festival Chorus and The BBC Concert Orchestra last Wednesday at the Barbican.

The twin themes that ran through the evening were like the answer to one of those tortuous questions on Radio 4's Round Britain Quiz. The themes were Romeo and Juliet and Leonard Bernstein. The latter will always be tied to the former via his fabulous score for West Side Story and, of course, this year is the centenary of his birth. He also died the year of the birth of the third composer

of the evening – Ryan Latimer. *Geddit?*

The opener, Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet, is often the piece that captures the heart of the would-be music lover. This performance was superb: its familiarity can make it invisible but, when heard live, it has the capacity to surprise with its power and beauty.

Ryan Latimer's Frigates and Folly was a CEFC commission and this its world premiere. Comprising passages from Moby Dick, it features the thoughts and observations of Ahab's second mate Stubb. Latimer has created an engaging and hugely enjoyable short piece. A jolly, spirited opening, plenty of novelty percussion and brass (including



Composer Ryan Latimer takes the plaudits at the end of last week's show

Picture: DAVID WINSKILL

tubas have a humour all their own) – even a spoken part delivered via megaphone. Well constructed and great fun.

Bernstein's Chichester Psalms are a world away in content but embody the same life force as Frigates and Folly. A committed, sensitive but animated delivery by the CEFC: solo parts were given by members of the choir

but the centre piece (and scene stealer) was Adonai ro-i, lo ehsar performed by the gifted 12 year-old alto Joshua Abrahams. Shadowing David Temple's exaggerated bows, the lad was thrilled with the applause and beaming when presented with a Joshua sized bouquet. He even gave a little skip as he left the stage.

The finale to the evening was an electric performance of four songs from West Side Story. The soloists were brilliant as they strutted the front of the stage in period costume: sky-scraper high energy and a bottomless pool of talent.

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