

THE TIMES



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RPO/ Fischer-Dieskau Barbican

Although he followed his father's example to the extent of making a musical name while in his twenties, Martin Fischer-Dieskau has moved into his next decade before introducing himself to London, conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on Sunday night. He was joined by another and younger musical scion, Vovka Ashkenazy, as the soloist in Grieg's Piano Concerto, and together they brought an engaging freshness of spirit to what can seem a faded favourite.

Theirs was a sober, sensitive and often poetic performance, notably in the opening movement, with the conductor taking none of the character or detail for granted and keeping a watchful balance with the pianist. Mr Ashkenazy was inclined to make the slow movement sound unduly stiff-jointed at times in the interests of precise articulation, but his incisive attack, sonorous chords and buoyant rhythm brought about an exhilarating and joyous finale.

Mr Fischer-Dieskau preceded the concerto with Handel's *Water Music*, invoking not the contemporary taste for scholarly reconstruction but the suite that Hamilton Harty arranged to suit the full orchestra. It was done with skill and dignity.

Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony after the interval was not quite the summation of earlier virtues. It was firm but bland, not yielding to undue sentiment but in need of warmer phrasing here and there. The funeral march was made to sound more wistful than tragic, but the conducting throughout nevertheless had a welcome economy of gesture for its well-defined intentions.

Noël Goodwin