

Keep on Trekking

A concert review of *Star Trek—Live in Concert* at the Royal Albert Hall.

By Dave Norris



The 21st Century Symphony Orchestra formed in 1999 under the conductorship of Ludwig Wicki with the express purpose of performing film music. They offer approximately 35 concerts each year from October to May, primarily in their native Lucerne, Switzerland. This ensemble of over 100 musicians and chorus, renowned for their presentations of Howard Shore’s *Lord of the Rings Symphony*, performed in London from May 29 through 31, celebrating Michael Giacchino’s music from J.J. Abrams’ rebooted *Star Trek* franchise. Many similar “music played to picture” concerts have sprung up recently—such as *West Side Story* and *Singin’ in the Rain*—and Royal Albert Hall played host to *Gladiator Live* earlier in the same week. For *Star Trek—Live in Concert*, however, the composer—and, as it turned out, the filmmakers—were involved in the presentation of *Star Trek* and *Star Trek Into Darkness*.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the *Star Trek* (2009) concert on the evening of May 29, but composer Giacchino, director Abrams and the reboot’s very own Scotty, actor Simon Pegg, were all on stage to introduce the proceedings, much to the excitement of the full house. The next day, the orchestra performed *Star Trek Into Darkness*, which had premiered the prior weekend in Lucerne. Although the filmmakers were absent at this performance, audience members were able to attend the “BAFTA and the

Royal Albert Hall Conversations with Screen Composers” event that coincided with the concert.

Nearly 200 people crammed into the Albert Hall’s Elgar Room to hear producer, broadcaster and film music aficionado Tommy Pearson in conversation with Giacchino—a true treat. Giacchino told of his love of film music from an early age and how he ended up working in the marketing department at Disney while studying composition at UCLA. This then led to a job composing the music for *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* video game. Giacchino recalled that after Steven Spielberg played the game’s demo, he insisted on meeting the fledgling composer to say, “This is great! When are you going to fully orchestrate this and record it with an orchestra?” He also shared how after scoring the *Medal of Honor* series of games, he received a letter saying, “Hey, my name is J.J. Abrams and I love your music on *Medal of Honor*. I’m doing a TV series called *Alias* and I’d love you to do the music.” Thereby, another great director/composer collaboration was born.

We were additionally treated to a composer’s view of the mechanics of scoring, which Giacchino kindly illustrated by showing the climax of *Super 8* without score and then, via a series of photos, the process of sitting down, writing, discussing it with Abrams via FaceTime, and presenting the sketch to an orchestrator for the eventual recording session. Then, we watched the scene again with full score as presented in the final mix of the movie. It was fascinating, especially for some of the uninitiated in the audience.

During this two-hour conversation, British string quartet Bond provided live music, beautifully performing the final cue from *Lost* and closing the event with “Married Life” from the Oscar-winning *Up*. Giacchino was genuine and expressed his passion for music and the projects in which he’s involved. He even confessed his guilty pleasure of reading film score message boards to see fans’ comments and presented some of his favorite “negative criticisms” on-screen for some good-hearted fun. He also said that he was looking forward to sitting down in a theatre next summer to hear John Williams’ new score for *Star Wars: Episode VII*. Afterward, he happily spent about 40 minutes signing autographs and talking to fans.

Come evening, the Royal Albert Hall was full once again and Giacchino introduced the orchestra and Maestro Wicki—and then, the audience experienced the equivalent of 100 people walking a tightrope for two hours. The picture on the hall’s big screen was bright and impressive; the film’s sound effects were dialed down so dialogue and music took center stage. The movie was presented with subtitles in case any of the dialogue was missed, and an intermission was inserted at a suitable part of the story to give the orchestra a break.



The orchestra were absolutely spot on with their performance, and this is no small credit to Ludwig Wicki. He conducted to a monitor that played a “scribed print,” which had an amber streamer before a cue was about to start, followed by sync marks, then a green streamer at the start of the cue and red at the end. The tempo remained faithful to the original recording, which it had to be considering the nature of the presentation. The opening credit music and “Ship to Ship”—an orchestral tour de force—both received loud applause from the sold-out crowd. Before we knew it, the choir were on their feet as they joined the orchestra in performing the entire end credit suite, which garnered a thunderous standing ovation for conductor, orchestra, choir and, of course, composer who, as an encore, conducted a short piece for orchestra and choir from his upcoming score to *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*.

This was one of the great orchestras performing in a great venue, and it was one of the most acoustically satisfying evenings I’ve experienced there. Despite the rigorous program, the hardworking orchestra performed the entire thing again—both films, virtually back-to-back on the following day.

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