



Sakari Oramo

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BBC Proms 2024 reviews: our music critics' verdicts on the concerts

The best and worst of the annual concert season at the Royal Albert Hall and beyond — and how to hear and watch them on catch-up



Anu Komsi was the soloist as Sakari Oramo conducted the Sibelius Academy Symphony Orchestra (★★★★☆)
CHRIS CHRISTODOULOU/BBC

Will it be a vintage season at the BBC Proms? It's David Pickard's last hurrah as director of the festival, and the concerts are also spread out over Great Britain like never before, with important events scheduled in Bristol and Gateshead as well as London. Here are all the reviews from the summer by The Times music critics, from newest to oldest — as well as links so you can catch up with the concerts yourself on [iPlayer](#) or on [BBC Sounds](#). Feel free to join in the conversation in the comments section at the end with your own recommendations: what was your highlight of the season, and what did we miss?

Holst's *The Planets* — out of this world concert and a bovine baffler

★★★★☆

What a night! I was sucked into a magical forest by a Swedish wood nymph, spent more than half an hour meeting Finnish cows and cruised the seven other planets orbiting the Sun. It left me exhausted.

But also exhilarated. Few concert spectacles are as heart-warming as a confident student orchestra tackling symphonic repertoire with total aplomb. And here we had two orchestras: the Sibelius Academy Symphony Orchestra from Helsinki, plus the Royal College of Music Symphony Orchestra from across the road. Sakari Oramo, the academy's leading professor, took charge with his usual understated skill, whether the music dumped us in some of the solar system's most hostile corners (Holst's *The Planets*) or left us alone with Finnish livestock in Lara Poe's Proms commission *Laulut maaseudulta* (*Songs from the Countryside*).

The latter was the concert's disappointment. Endearing and noble creatures though cows are, this 34-minute song cycle did not offer sufficient variety to keep us fully engaged. Anu Komsu pirouetted splendidly at the top of her extensive soprano range, but the volume of words (derived from rural recollections by the composer's Finnish grandmother) proved an audience hurdle and one not made lighter by the Albert Hall's idiosyncratic acoustics. Poe's musical discourse toughened when a storm blew in or a particular cow turned obstinate, but most of her textures stayed too intricate and feathery to help a long work devoted to chewing the cud.

Still, the concert's compensations were considerable. Sibelius's early tone poem *The Wood Nymph* combined abundant drive with teasing mystery, while Holst's suite sounded splendid, all the way from Mars's marauding rhythms to the disembodied beauties of Neptune, complete with wordless sounds from the RCM Chamber Choir somewhere in the building's nether reaches. And the musicians' beaming smiles facing the enthusiastic applause told their own story. What a night! Available on [BBC Sounds](#)

Geoff Brown