

Transcribed from the Evening Standard
Tuesday 20 July 2004

Proms 2004

BBC NOW/Hickox
Royal Albert Hall Monday 19 July 2004

Stephen Pettitt

... Earlier in the evening, a packed house heard Richard Hickox conduct the BBC National Orchestra of Wales in an all-British programme topped by Elgar's Cockaigne overture and tailed by his Enigma Variations.

Both pieces gave another excuse for us to hear the rebuilt Royal Albert Hall organ in their closing passages.

The BBC NOW made a fine sound, but Hickox, a British music specialist, maybe relaxed into both works a little too comfortably. It still needs hard selling.

In between, there were two works with chorus: Holst's The Hymn of Jesus, whose text comes from the same Hymn of Christ that Harsent and Birtwistle use, and Delius's setting of Walt Whitman's Sea Drift. The Holst, distinguished by the singing of the Bach Choir, the BBC National Chorus of Wales and the St Paul's Cathedral Choir, was extremely effective.

The Delius, minus the St Paul's lads but plus the mellow sounding baritone of Thomas Hampson, was not. Whitman's muscular words deserve music less vapid.