

## Ennio at 81, still dazzling

**MUSIC**

**ENNIO MORRICONE**

ROYAL ALBERT HALL

ALFRED Hitchcock gave the Royal Albert Hall and his favourite composer, Bernard Herrmann, starring roles in the 1956 film *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, when at the climax of the cantata, an assassin misfires and falls from one of the balconies. There was no such bloodshed in the venue tonight, packed to the rafters with a crowd of all ages, but there was a constantly shifting stream of moods, emotions and landscapes orchestrated by the man who is arguably music fans' favourite film composer of the past 50 years.

Ennio Morricone last appeared at the venue seven years ago, when the crowd bellowed out *Happy Birthday* to the Italian composer as he hit 75. It was a shock, then, to see Morricone, now in his early eighties, still skip out on stage like a man 20 years younger.

Perhaps his vigour is down to his dazzling work rate. Since 1961 he has worked on more than 500 film scores and is still going strong, recently popping up in Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*. Yet despite the acclaim for his work, particularly his legendary collaborations on Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns, he has never won an Oscar – a possible rebuke for his refusal to leave his beloved Rome for Hollywood.

This night's adoring audience was more than determined to make up for that slight as Morricone set about trying to summarise his own work.

He started off with a selection from his late Sixties scores, which set the template for Morricone's influential blend of the classical and modern: simple motifs that swell out with strings layered over funk grooves, or bossa nova swings shifting against abstract piano lines. Joined by the soprano Susanna Rigacci and the Crouch End Chorus, everything shifted up a gear as he moved into his work with Leone. Yet while the theme to *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* reached a thrilling operatic climax, the sound levels overall were too quiet and there was something unsatisfying in catching such short glimpses of each work, like reading the first page of a dozen novels without ever getting into the story.

This frustration was resolved in the second act when Morricone moved into his later, more romantic style, culminating in the beautiful theme tune from *The Mission*, where the drama of the music claimed a story of its own. Three standing encores later, the maestro, modestly bowing, was finally allowed to take his leave.

Ⓢ RATING ★★★★★

Bernadette McNulty