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## Classical

### Ennio Morricone

Hammersmith Apollo, London

★★★★★

Despite having scored more than 400 movies, Ennio Morricone has visited Britain only three times to perform his compositions. Ever the perfectionist, he postponed this concert, scheduled for July, when he felt the orchestra were not sufficiently au fait with elements of the idiosyncratic programme. Morricone has been given licence to roam freely throughout his back catalogue, cherry-picking from his extraordinary oeuvre.

Once again Morricone is conducting the Roma Sinfonietta and the 80-voice choir of the Crouch End Festival Chorus. The reverence with which this musical maverick is regarded is reflected in a standing ovation before the composer – 78, but looking a decade younger – even reaches the podium.

Besides his soundtrack alchemy, Morricone has had a parallel career as a composer of contemporary chamber music, and tonight's programme is divided into six thematic suites. He opens with the rarely performed Novecento, a set of three ensemble pieces marked by atonal interventions and gorgeous symphonic strings.

The evening's highlight, inevitably, is the stirring sequence of lavish scores to Sergio Leone's 1960s spaghetti westerns. The exhilarating coyote-howl theme from *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is magnificent: macho and moody, yet alive with febrile grace. Then soprano Susanna Rigacci, a long-time Morricone cohort, is tremendous on *Giu la Testa* from *A Fistful of Dollars*, her vibrato enhancing the number's vivacious melodrama.

Morricone closes with the stately, Mahler-like grandeur of Gabriel's Oboe and *In Earth As in Heaven* from the 1986 soundtrack to *The Mission*.

then is cheered back to perform three encores. It's a fittingly tumultuous end to an evening in the company of a maestro whose music may be instrumental but is never incidental.

Ian Gittins



Once upon a time in west London ...  
Morricone at the Hammersmith Apollo



**Pop**  
**Ennio Morricone**  
 Hammersmith Apollo, W6  
 ★★★★★

DAVID SINCLAIR

In a surprisingly erudite introduction, Jonathan Ross hailed Ennio Morricone as "the greatest composer of film music in the history of cinema". To a tumultuous round of applause, "the maestro" strode briskly to the conductor's podium in front of the Roma Sinfonietta. The orchestra had flown in for two shows at the Apollo, a venue more usually associated with rock concerts, but now described, in terms commensurate with the

occasion, as "one of London's most magnificent Art Deco movie palaces".

It is only five years since the Italian composer, 78, gave the first British concert performance of his career. His visits remain rare and an air of expectation, worthy of a scene in one of the hundreds of films he has scored, hung over the hall as he called the orchestra to order. The strings picked out the stately melody of *Romanzo*, the first of a selection of pieces from his soundtrack to *Novecento*, the 1976 movie directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. Like many of Morricone's compositions, the theme was grand and mellifluous, and notably conventional both in its lush instrumentation and gradual

development. Not for the maestro the jarring harmonies, sudden rhythmic quirks and other stock-in-trade devices for signposting moments of dramatic tension that crop up in many lesser movie soundtracks.

And yet the one area of his huge repertoire in which he departed from the orchestral norm was also the most keenly awaited. A selection of themes from the "spaghetti" westerns brought a range of more atmospheric instrumentation and effects into play. As the famous whistling motif of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* swirled round the hall, tubular bells clanged like the peal from a distant church tower, an electric guitar twanged, and the bows of the violinists and

cellists bounced across their strings like horses galloping across the desert sands. With the full force of the Crouch End Festival Chorus now coming into play, led with fierce intensity by the Boadicca-like soprano Susanna Rigacci, the themes from *A Fistful of Dynamite* and *The Ecstasy of Gold* brought the show to a spectacularly rousing, if somewhat premature, climax. There was still a beautifully rendered *Gabriel's Oboe* and other pieces from *The Mission* to come, and then a sequence of encores as the maestro "reluctantly" returned, again and again ... and again in response to the improbably sustained ovation. Downing his baton, he walked into the sunset at last.