

Review: CBSO/Cosmic Dances at Symphony Hall



By John Gough | [Apr 5 2013](#)

The CBSO's involvement in the UK's version of El Sistema, titled In Harmony, meant that the audience for this concert included many rows of excited (and well-behaved) children for whom this was the first time they had heard and seen a live orchestra.

The Venezuelan conductor Diego Matheuz is himself a product of El Sistema, and this somewhat schizophrenic evening featured two Mexican works followed by a Russian masterpiece, rather implausibly linked by their unifying title.

MAGNETAR, a concerto for electric cello and orchestra by the Mexican composer Enrico Chapela, is yet another major CBSO work co-commissioned with help from Birmingham's Feeney Trust. Magnetars are a rare type of neutron star with a powerful magnetic field, and their properties and activities informed (in the composer's mind at least) the shape and progress of the work.

There were many influences at work here yet everything was successfully integrated into a satisfying three movement structure with an enormous range of textures, balanced between orchestra and soloist, and allowing for all sorts of novel timbres and effects. Lyrical moments sat next to rock riffs, episodes of cool jazz met Dr Who type sound effects, yet everything convinced us that the work was an effective whole. The Herculean soloist Johannes Moser, played with panache and musicality, while the composer, discreetly seated behind him on the platform, operated the sound altering electronics. An intriguing and imaginative work.

The second half moved abruptly from stars to star-crossed lovers and Prokofiev's inspired ballet music for Romeo and Juliet. Matheuz, a slight but commanding figure, conducted from memory, creating a perfect balance between love and strife, everything full of character, sparkling, swaggering, passionate and soaring as required, full of tragic

momentum until the inevitable end with the lovers united in death. Cosmic indeed!



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