

10 December 2014

**Concert**  
**Donatella Flick**  
**LSO Conducting**  
**Competition**  
Barbican  
★★★★☆

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From comedy to classical: read the reviews first [thetimes.co.uk/firstnight](http://thetimes.co.uk/firstnight)

If all things were equal then on Monday night we'd simply be celebrating that a young Brit had won a major musical competition that includes a £15,000 cheque presented by the Prince of Wales. This is the world of conducting, however, and with the glass ceiling well short of smashing — a glacial cracking is about the best you could call it — you can understand why the Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition would be trumpeting the fact that as well as being a talented maestro, Elim Chan happens to be a woman and the first to grab the prize.

If anyone was at a disadvantage, however, it didn't feel like it was Chan, who at 28 already has a wealth of experience. Here's the difficulty of this competition: in an age when plum conducting jobs regularly go to twentysomethings, is it already too late for 23-year-old Jiri Rozen from the Czech Republic to make it big?

Rozen brought an instinctive sensitivity and awareness of phrasing to Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture — a piece each finalist conducted in turn — and was the only maestro to tone the London Symphony Orchestra

down as well as ratchet them up. Yet his grasp on the slithery rhythms of the first section of Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements* and the finale of Rimsky-Korsakov's splashy *Scheherazade* was shakier. Here was a case of technique that simply needed sharpening.

Mihhail Gerts, a 30-year-old who has already spent seven years at Estonian National Opera, is a conductor who looks the part: ramrod-straight posture, spiffy tails, good baton action. His *Egmont* was the most dramatic, his section of the Rimsky the most rounded. He obviously gives good rehearsal.

Yet for insight into the music and connection to the orchestra this was Chan's night. For her the LSO was winningly evocative in the eerie central movement of the Stravinsky and so sensuous and detailed was the middle movement of *Scheherazade* under her baton that for a while you simply thought you were at a regular concert and not Conductors' Crufts. So did the audience, who spontaneously applauded. I joined in.

**Neil Fisher**

**Broadcast on Dec 12 on Classic FM**