

MUSIC
BBC SSO/MUSTONEN

CITY HALLS, GLASGOW

★★★

THEY make a great combination, Bartók and Hindemith: the pungent Magyar folksiness of the former and the Germanic exuberance of the latter, both sharing an ear-tweaking harmonic richness.

The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra clearly thought so, choosing the two composers for a short series this week and next based around Bartók's three highly individual piano concertos, which began with an afternoon concert showcasing the Third.

It was a shame, though, that Finnish soloist Olli Mustonen's performance was so wilfully eccentric. In contrast with Bartók's earlier, more aggressive music, his Third Piano Concerto is an elegant, neo-classical work, but Mustonen insisted on a brittle, percussive sound, injecting graceful phrases with wayward accents and seeming to strain at the orchestra's leash. His

assertive pianism crackled with vitality and power, but it made a bizarre contrast against the BBC SSO's urbane, sophisticated playing under Martyn Brabbins.

Mustonen seemed better suited to the Hindemith Piano Music with Orchestra, a left-hand concerto written in 1923 but only now receiving its UK premiere (it had languished unplayed in the estate of one-handed pianist Paul Wittgenstein until 2002). Mustonen relished the work's pounding rhythms, and pierced the teeming barrages of sound from the orchestra.

Brabbins led beautifully sonorous, highly idiomatic performances of the opening and closing pieces – Bartók's giddy Dance Suite and Hindemith's serious-minded Mathis der Maler Symphony. The BBC SSO played incisively, but Brabbins might have focused more on the works' drama: although his readings were beautifully crafted, they were too good-natured to be truly revelatory.

DAVID KETTLE