

MUSIC**BBC SCOTTISH
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA/
MATTHIAS PINTSCHER**
CITY HALLS, GLASGOW

★★★★

THERE'S no denying that Matthias Pintscher, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's artist-in-association, is a superb craftsman. Like the refined, precise music that he composes, his performances as a conductor are clean, superbly balanced and full of exquisite detail. It was an approach that paid off marvellously in the concert opener, Stravinsky's *Song of the Nightingale* – in Pintscher's hands, it was sprightly, colourful, sharply etched. And against the glowing sheen of the orchestral sound he drew from the BBC SSO players, there were plenty of opportunities for soloists to shine – flautist Yvonne Paterson made a seductive nightingale, and guest leader Bradley Creswick was full of wit.

But in the slow drag of his rather laboured Schubert "Unfinished" Symphony that followed, however, Pintscher seemed so intent on conjuring beautiful sounds that he lost track of flow and impetus. The result, despite its superbly glossy surface, sounded more like a sequence of exquisitely crafted episodes than a developing whole.

He closed, though, with a rip-roaring account of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* – helped by the charismatic presence of violist Antoine Tamestit. It's a tough work to pull off – its solo viola part isn't flashy enough to make it a concerto, yet it's still the central focus of the piece's storytelling. Tamestit was entirely inside the music, playing with unfussy, unshowy energy and generous lyricism. It made for a captivating conclusion to a sometimes frustrating evening.

DAVID KETTLE*Seen on 13.02.14*