

MUSIC**BBC SSO/MARTYN BRABBINS**

CITY HALLS, GLASGOW

★★★★

FORGET easy-going, uncomplicated jazzy charm. British pianist Freddy Kempff's spellbinding account of the Gershwin Piano Concerto with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra was so full of brooding intensity and raw emotion that it felt more like Rachmaninov. That was no bad thing, though: he was bracing and sincere, with a sometimes percussive brilliance to his playing, and he made easy work of traversing the concerto's chain of disparate sections, highlighting the sheer modernism of the music.

It was revelatory stuff, and matched by a BBC SSO on exceptionally vivid form under Martyn Brabbins – principal trumpet Mark O'Keeffe's smoky slow-movement solo simmered with sultry passion. There might not have been much indulgent suppleness to Brabbins's pretty assertive reading, but there was no lack of detail, nor of beautifully shaped phrases. And the orchestra's sound shone from within with a resplendent glow.

The concert had opened with a characterful account – the UK premiere – of Sean Shepherd's *Blue Blazes*, an entertaining yet strangely melancholy showpiece in gaudy colours and clattering percussion (including saucepans and swanee whistles) that showed off the talents of the orchestra's players magnificently.

They ended with a beautifully crafted reading of Ives's Second Symphony, bristling with quotes from American popular songs and marching tunes refracted through the rich musical language of Brahms or Dvorak. Brabbins pulled off the touching slow movement with nobility and unassuming confidence, and he handled the tumult of competing quotations that end the symphony with mischievous yet thoroughly convincing glee. All in all, a concert of revelations.

DAVID KETTLE

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