

Sarah-Jane Brandon were the icing on a delicious cake.

KENNETH WALTON

MUSIC

BBC SSO & Denis Kozukhin

City Halls, Glasgow



There are times when Glasgow's City Halls feels simply too intimate and cosy for the enormous ambitions and sheer scale of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's performances. This monumental concert under Russian conductor Alexander Vedernikov was a case in point: two mammoth Russian works, shatteringly loud at times – but raw volume wasn't really the issue. Rather, it was the music's visionary power and visceral impact that made the evening feel so overwhelming, especially in City Halls' space.

Pianist Denis Kozukhin has been a regular and much-admired visitor to the BBC SSO, and his account of Tchaikovsky's

well-loved First Piano Concerto was big-boned, urgent, sometimes rather breathless, but so mighty as to sweep aside any concerns. He tackled the work's relentless virtuosity with what felt like elegant choreography, and a fair bit of rhythmic freedom too. But there was a steely determination to his playing, matched brilliantly in the Orchestra's forthright, sharply defined playing.

The SSO players were on remarkably focused form – as well as maintaining an astonishing sustained intensity – in Shostakovich's Symphony No. 11, an enigmatic musical depiction of the failed 1905 Russian uprising, unapologetically serious-minded in Vedernikov's powerful account.

He took a broad view of the Symphony's uninterrupted hour of grinding intensity, ratcheting up tension expertly across huge spans of music. It was cathartic, yet profoundly troubling too – vivid in its musical storytelling, yet unavoidably bleak in its conclusions. A magnificent evening, if sometimes rather overpowering.

DAVID KETTLE