

Familiar Mahlerian melodic contours undergo pressurised contortion, parody turns to Dantesque devilment, and at two magical points, one of the densest Mahler chords you'll hear evokes a soul at saturation point. But there is peace and beauty, too, not least in closing bars that conjure up memories of the Fifth Symphony's 'Adagietto' and a final sense of release.

The SSO's performance struck that critical balance between the rugged and the pure. Runnicles' pacing, his reading of Mahler's often frenetic scoring, were authoritative and enlightening.

And did anyone else notice virtuoso violinist James Ehnes playing his Stradivarius at the back of the first violins? What a cool customer. He had starred in the concert's opening half, with a performance of Glazunov's Violin Concerto that combined technical perfection with glowing, glittering musicality. His Bach encore was a supersonic sensation. Catch it in Edinburgh tomorrow.

KEN WALTON

Seen on 24.09.15

● Performance at Usher Hall, Edinburgh, tomorrow

OPERA
SCOTTISH OPERA:
COSÌ FAN TUTTE
MACROBERT ARTS CENTRE,
STIRLING
★★★

THERE'S no doubt about it, Mozart's *Così fan tutte* is a troublesome beast. It might have been OK in the 1790s, but it's far less straightforwardly acceptable now, and beneath

the opera's surface of sparkling humour there are plenty of unsavoury themes – two young bucks disguising themselves to test their lovers' fidelity (and for a bet); a seedy older figure urging them on for motivations that are never entirely clear; and of course, the conclusion that all women are essentially up for grabs, and can be made to fall for whatever crosses their paths.

And there's a moment in Lissa Lorenzo's bright, eager new touring production for Scottish Opera – which kicked off at Stirling's MacRobert Arts Centre and visits 19 venues

the length and breadth of Scotland between now and early November – where her Ferrando and Guglielmo stumble in their subterfuge, suddenly aware that it might be working a bit too well, even concerned about the feelings of the women they love. But it soon passes. What we're left with is a production that seems to take things resolutely at face value, keeping a steady flow of charming repartee and guilty gags, but which, despite its abundant good-natured humour, ultimately feels a bit unsettling, as though we're all party to something unpalatable.



Così fan tutte is less straightforwardly acceptable these days

There are some fine performances, though – not least from pianist Claire Haslin, who accompanies throughout with sparkling energy and a delightful lightness of touch. Lorenzo's central quartet are slightly unbalanced, however, from fine tenor Tristan Llyr Griffiths who invests Ferrando's every gesture with meaning, through to Rosalind Coad as a somewhat cool, detached Fiordiligi, with a wonderfully lithe, silvery soprano but less to play with in terms of characterisation. Lorenzo's Don Alfonso – James McOran Campbell – is suave but seems rather unengaged, and sometimes struggles to project even over the piano accompaniment, let alone offering fresh insights into his rather dodgy character's motivations. But Jennifer France as a gleeful, mischievous Despina is a joy, with a bright, clearly articulated soprano and some nicely persuasive acting too.

Robbie Sinnott's exquisite staging relocates the action to a high-class clothes emporium in 1950s Italy, and the elegance and sophistication of set and costumes are glorious – but they're less well matched, however, by a similar sophistication in the handling of the opera's themes. It's a captivating, entertaining, humorous evening, full of fine singing, but is it challenging, inspirational or provocative? Far less so.

DAVID KETTLE

● Victoria Halls, Helensburgh, today, and on tour throughout Scotland until 7 November