

EIFreviews

CLASSICAL

La damnation de Faust

Usher Hall



It's a big year for opera at the 70th International Festival – especially for innovative concert stagings, with five of them in the Usher Hall programme (alongside Iván Fischer's stripped-back Don Giovanni at the Festival Theatre). To which you might very justifiably add a sixth, in Berlioz's idiosyncratic opera for the imagination, given a simple but extremely effective performance that filled the Usher Hall stage with performers.

Laurent Naouri's suave, seductive Mephistopheles prowled unpredictably between the stage's different levels, while Michael Spyres's Faust was all wide-eyed eagerness to embrace the devilish new possibilities offered to him, with an effortless, beautiful agile tenor too. Michèle Losier conveyed barely suppressed passion as love interest Marguerite, and the combined forces of the Edinburgh Festival Chorus, Hallé Choir and NYCoS National Girls Choir provided a glorious sound – crisp, rich, roof-raising when needed, and sung with utter conviction. And convincingly tipsy, too, in Berlioz's Leipzig pub scene.

Driving the composer's gargantuan forces – which also included six harps, plus numerous brass and percussion slipping on and off stage to provide distance effects – was conductor Mark Elder, who summoned a gutsy, impeccably detailed account from the Hallé, on

near miraculous form. It was an evening of glorious music theatre, as thought-provoking as it was downright entertaining.

DAVID KETTLE

DANCE

Project R.E.B.E.L

Castlebrae Community High School



You wait 70 years for hip hop dance theatre to make its Edinburgh International Festival debut – and then two shows come along in one week. We are very grateful – please let this be the start.

Exhibiting a unison other dance companies can only dream of, Boy Blue Entertainment lives up to its name – every move is entertaining. But there's so much more, as Project R.E.B.E.L proved.

After the incredible Blak Whyte Gray last week, choreographer Kenrick Sandy and composer Michael Asante served up another helping of intelligent, emotionally-charged dance from Boy Blue's up-and-coming wing, Alpha Blue, dancers aged from 18-25.

The piece opened with a pick 'n' mix of hip hop styles. Popping, locking, krump, waackin', breakin' – all executed with mind-boggling speed and precision. In black outfits, the 12 dancers inhabited Asante's soundtrack like a second skin.

Returning in stained, ripped clothing, Project R.E.B.E.L. took a turn for the political. Snatches of American news reports of black civilians shot by the police made it clear that, while Boy Blue knows how to entertain,