

# **Iceland SO/Yan Pascal Tortelier**

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

★★★★

"Are you still part of it?" quipped conductor Yan Pascal Tortelier, explaining that he'd finish the eighth and final concert in the Iceland Symphony Orchestra's UK tour with two encores of British music. Joking aside – and despite persuasive accounts of the brief movements from Walton's Henry V and Elgar's The Wand of Youth – it did feel like a surprisingly long concert.

Ironically it was the concert's most audience-friendly element – movements from Bizet's *L'arlésienne*, which opened the programme – that felt a little redundant, not helped by the rather heavy reading from Tortelier and his Icelandic players.

Their closer, Sibelius's First Symphony, was finely articulated and energetic, but too many opportunities for drama and contrast were passed by seemingly unexplored.

In between, however, came two brilliantly arresting experiences.

First, South Korean pianist Yeol Eum Son's remarkably chiselled, fluent account of Ravel's Left Hand Piano Concerto.

Son was astonishingly dextrous in Ravel's one-handed dashes up and down the keyboard, but also balanced a granitic power with a sense of melting poetry, her solo passages exquisitely shaped and delivered with calm conviction. Tortelier and his orches-

tra, too, seemed to relish the work's brooding menace and quicksilver mood swings in an incisive account.

After the interval came the ear-tweaking *Aeriality* by the orchestra's compatriot Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, more a sound installation than a conventional piece, which expertly explored horizontal and vertical sonic space with shifting harmonies and elemental eruptions of noise, thoroughly compelling and given a vibrant, sharply etched reading by Icelandic musicians clearly at one with the music.

Cope these days? The former Teardrop Explodes frontman has many guises – post-punk hero, indie pop troubadour, historical writer, esteemed academic, playful political commentator, gnostic rocker, Krautrock, drone rocker, off his rocker – not to mention his numerous appellations: arch-drude ("self-styled" he added), Lord Yatesbury and now Grand Prince Julian, presumptive ruler of Sutherland, resplendent in his trademark hippymilitary chic. "I'll try not to be too imperious," he reassured his acolytes.

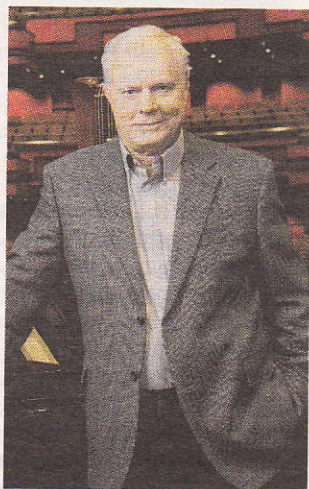
Cope was conscious that, on his last visit, the talking/playing ratio was perhaps weighted too heavily towards the former.

This set, he contended, would involve more songs, played solo, mostly on acoustic guitar with additional effects and a brief diversion to key-

tronic historical perspective with songs born of curiosity, not anger. The light fragrant folk pop of C\*\*\*s Can F\*\*\* Off was written mischievously to offend American linguistic sensibilities. New album *Self Civil War* – the title lifted from a pre-English Civil War poem – has been inspired by the times we live in, with countries and individuals divided against themselves.

The direct acoustic punk ditty *Your Facebook My Laptop* was a none more current cautionary tale of online behaviour, while back catalogue gem *The Greatness and Perfection of Love* was an ideal pop nugget for Valentine's weekend. "This would have been a hit if anyone had bought it," Cope quipped.

There would arguably be greater fortune to be made if he accepted offers to reform *The Teardrop Explodes* but this apparently will not hap-



↑ Yan Pascal Tortelier: joked with the audience

**DAVID KETTLE**