

Hebrides Ensemble

Pencaitland Parish Church

★★★★★

Red Note Ensemble

Loretto School, Musselburgh

★★★★★

WEDNESDAY was new music day at the Lammermuir Festival – and it offered two brilliantly persuasive events featuring music by composers with deep connections to the East Lothian event.

First up, in Pencaitland's splendidly quirky Parish Church was the second of the festival's three Prometheus-inspired commissions from composer in association, Edinburgh-based Stuart MacRae, given by the Hebrides Ensemble. Setting a text of his own creation, *I am Prometheus* was virtually an operatic scena, cunningly scored for string quartet, harp, flute and clarinet, plus tenor Joshua Ellicott giving a restless, questioning, deeply human performance as the eponymous Titan. There was an enjoyable Britten-like directness and clarity to MacRae's writing, in which even the simplest of gestures could take on huge significance as the music developed, and an otherworldly beauty to his ghostly microtonal harmonies. But most impressive was the work's handling of time, the slow-moving semi-repetitions towards its conclusion delivering a memorable sense of damaged grandeur.

Down the road that evening, in the intimate theatre of Loretto School in Mussel-

there's something eerily familiar about the opening scene of Wils Wilson's new Lyceum production of *Twelfth Night*, co-produced with Bristol Old Vic. The big, old Edwardian or Victorian house that's cheap because of its dilapidation, the crowds of young people bent on partying for days on end, and above all the clothes, from sharp business suits satirically worn, to wildly flared jeans, glittering platform shoes, and trailing dresses and kaftans worn with elaborate eye makeup, by both sexes.

The influence of Bowie and of the Mick Jagger film *Performance* therefore looms large, as Wilson's 12-strong company find an old copy of *Twelfth Night*, and start allocating roles. Dawn Sievewright's startling but often brilliant

burgh, the Red Note Ensemble offered an equally illuminating collision of music by John Adams and young Liverpool-born composer and clarinettist Mark Simpson, the festival's artist in residence. Simpson's dense, hyperactive *Nur Musik* got a muscular, energetic account, though oboe soloist Jennifer Brittlebank occasionally struggled to make herself heard above Simpson's teeming ensemble textures. Far more introspective was his lyrical *Straw Dogs*, and he closed the concert as clarinet soloist in Adams's eccentric *Gnarly Buttons* – perky and spiky in its off-kilter hoedown, rapturous and heart-on-sleeve in its closing love song, compelling and captivating throughout.

DAVID KETTLE