

**Mr McFall's Chamber:
Music from Poland**

Queen's Hall, Edinburgh



THERE was a sombre thread running right through this enterprising, illuminating, all-Polish concert from Mr McFall's Chamber, as violinist Robert McFall himself pointed out. And it wasn't just in the knowledge that much of the evening's music had been created in the heady days before Nazi invasion, or under the suffocating strictures of Soviet rule after the war.

No, a vein of deep melancholy seemed to run through the music itself, epitomised in the astonishing concluding Piano Sextet from Penderecki, which the players delivered in a white-hot, fiercely focused account of bristling conviction. They tackled the steadily mounting tension of its densely argued opening movement expertly, and in the long, slow second movement – which sent horn player Alec Frank-Gemmill up into the Queen's Hall's balcony for some nicely judged spatial effects – its sad,

shifting harmonies ached with poignancy.

The Sextet was nothing short of a revelation – as was, in its own way, the Second Piano Quintet by Grazyna Bacewicz that opened the concert, all wacky switchback shifts, relentless rhythms and devil-may-care experimentalism. And it got just the flamboyant, incisive performance it needed, with pianist Simon Smith in particular relishing the work's percussive figurations and thudding clusters.

In between came, as McFall quipped, six programmed encores, brief Polish tangos from the 1920s and 30s for which the ensemble transformed into a convincing dance band, suave and nonchalant in its crisp, exquisitely shaped playing, but brimming with heart-on-its-sleeve sadness too.

It was as thought-provoking, enlightening and expertly conceived as all the best concerts should be.

DAVID KETTLE