

MUSIC
NIGEL KENNEDY
PRESENTS BACH &
FATS WALLER

USHER HALL, EDINBURGH

★★★

YOU don't so much go to a Nigel Kennedy concert as enter his world for the evening – a world of daft, punchline-less jokes, football shirts, incongruous swearing and winks to the audience. At times it makes for a disconcerting experience – as though we're indulging an overgrown child whose behaviour we wouldn't otherwise tolerate.

Which would all be justified if Kennedy's performances were sparkingly exceptional. For some of the concert they were, but elsewhere they were far more run-of-the-mill.

He never really explained why he'd plumped for the striking combination of Bach and Fats Waller – although the brief jazz improvisations he inserted between his Bach pieces

made the link themselves. And although there was no doubting the energy and sincerity of his Bach playing, it felt quite rough around the edges, with sometimes sour intonation, a harsh, erratic tone and little sense of light and shade.

His *Andante* from the Second Sonata was breathtakingly focused, but he followed it with an ill-judged Bach-meets-reggae mash-up that did little for either style.

Kennedy seemed far more at ease in the jazz numbers, when his backing band of guitar, bass and drums really came into their own too. His *How Can You Face Me Now?* was lithe and full of character, and he gave a beautifully subtle, inward-looking account of Dave Brubeck's famous *Take Five*. A fantastically theatrical version of Monti's *Csárdás* brought together all the sublime musicianship and showmanship that Kennedy is capable of in a thoroughly entertaining encore.

DAVID KETTLE