

MUSIC
RED NOTE: NEW MUSIC
FOR STRINGS

ROYAL CONSERVATOIRE OF
SCOTLAND

★★★★

YOU couldn't have hoped for a more egalitarian concert. Student players from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's contemporary MusicLab group mingled on stage with the crack performers of the Red Note Ensemble, and likewise, a couple of brand-new student pieces nestled in among the programme's 20th-century classics.

The concert's aims were wholly laudable, and for the most part, so were its energetic performances – although a few things felt slightly rough around the edges.

The timeless repetitions of John Adams's classic minimalist workout *Shaker Loops* seemed too much like hard work for the music's witty harmonic shifts to shine through effortlessly. The sheer verve of the performers, though – especially Red Note

violinist Jackie Shave and MusicLab bassist Nikita Maumov – made the whole thing thrillingly compelling.

Shave was joined by MusicLab violinist Catrin Pryce Jones in an incisive account of Arvo Pärt's hypnotic *Tabula rasa*, both players beautifully matched in tone, phrasing and lithe movement, even if the limpid second movement seemed rather too hard-driven.

The two student pieces were bold enough to embrace simplicity – Francesca Le Lohé pitting a manic violin against stolid viola and cello in her persuasive *Que morro*, and Julia Munday summoning rich, opulent harmonies in her graceful, introspective *A Series of Apologies*.

The highlight was the short, but potent, *Prosen* by RCS head of composition Gordon McPherson, a lyrical yet turbulent piece written when he himself was a student. It brought together the world of academia, and the world beyond, in a vivid, heartfelt performance.

DAVID KETTLE