

Underpinned by Gardner's clear-minded vision and his orchestra's illuminating response, this performance reaffirmed Britten's unquestionable genius: his uncanny knack of creating the profoundest musical statements through ingenious, transparent craftsmanship.

KEN WALTON

CLASSICAL

René Pape and Camillo Radicke

Queen's Hall



Pious Christian faith; the inevitability of death. It was an unapologetically serious-minded recital from the exceptional German bass

René Pape and pianist Camillo Radicke. There might not have been many chuckles, but it nevertheless showed a singer of exceptional intensity and focus, a figure who communicated with disarming directness and sincerity.

There was an almost microscopic focus to Pape's singing, with every phoneme carefully dispatched – even the forbidding clusters of consonants in Dvořák's Czech-language Biblical Songs – and, more gratifyingly, a sensuousness to his variations in tone, from an almost ethereal half-voice to a hall-filling bellow. It was there, too, in Radicke's pianism, with chords exquisitely balanced and placed with care and precision, even if occasion-

ally he might have taken a lighter touch with some of the accompaniments' filigree decorations.

Pape found the passions surging quietly behind the religious devotion in Beethoven's hymn-like *Gelert Lied*, and in his hands, Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* – miniature song dramas in which death stalks the sick, the lost, the war-injured – were touching tragedies rather than gruesome comedies, and all the more chilling as a result. Quilter's *Three Shakespeare Songs* provided a snatch of light amid the otherwise dark material – but this was an exceptional recital, perceptive and entirely persuasive.

DAVID KETTLE