

Reviews



The RSNO produced a five-star performance in Beijing

MUSIC

ROYAL SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, BEIJING

★★★★★

THE Royal Scottish National Orchestra can seldom have sounded so good. For the centrepiece concert of its China tour, the orchestra took up residence for the night in Beijing's remarkable new National Centre for the Performing Arts, a vast, glowing, egg-like edifice right next to Tiananmen Square. And the spectacular acoustics of the centre's concert hall lent a rarely encountered clarity and depth to the RSNO's already lustrous sound.

Despite the Chinese capital's unremittingly sub-zero temperatures, an enthusiastic capacity audience had flocked to see the Scottish musicians, and the players rose to the grand occasion with incisive, passionate performances under an energetic yet suave Peter Oundjian.

The opening piece, Mendelssohn's *Scottish Symphony*, drew a strangely subdued response, but Oundjian ensured a dramatic expansiveness to the performance, and the orchestra responded with effortless deliveries of its Scottish folk evocations. The Chinese listeners were startled at first by the colour and energy that the RSNO brought to Peter Maxwell Davies's *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise*, then enthralled by the entrance of young piper Iain Crawford who turned heads in amazement as he delivered the closing bagpipe solo processing through the stalls.

Oundjian's vision of Elgar's *Enigma Variations* might have smoothed over some of the work's more abrupt contrasts, but it was surely paced, beautifully fluid, and replaced self-indulgent sentiment with a beautiful sense of barely repressed emotion.

Three encores brought the Chinese audience to its feet in a roar of appreciation – one that was thoroughly deserved.

DAVID KETTLE