

**MUSIC**  
**RSNO: CARMINA**  
**BURANA**  
USHER HALL, EDINBURGH  
★★★

IT WAS an astute move from RSNO conductor Peter Oundjian to pair Orff's crowd-pulling *Carmina Burana* with subtler, more challenging repertoire, thereby bringing lesser-known names to the attention of his capacity audience.

Like young Brit Thomas Adès, for example. The three dances from his shock opera *Powder Her Face* that opened the concert were far and away the evening's highlight: the RSNO bristled with energy under Oundjian's urgent direction, with just the right suavity and sophistication for these cartoonish whirlwinds. One minute it was all soaring

Hollywood harmonies, the next knotty, dissonant counterpoint, but everything was driven with fiery determination by an energetic Oundjian.

Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* might not be that little-known, but it certainly provided a contrast – between profane and sacred, as Oundjian suggested in his entertaining introduction.

But there was little transcendent spiritual grandeur in his pacy performance: instead, he made the piece a true fantasia, shot through with restless vigour.

Although the RSNO strings' playing lacked a certain expansiveness, it was pretty immaculate, with serene viol-like sounds from the mini-orchestra perched behind the main ensemble, and beautifully rhapsodic solos from the principals.

Ironically, the concert's main event was also its least convincing part. Oundjian drew powerful playing, tight and sharply etched, from the RSNO in *Carmina Burana*, but the chorus seemed to struggle: ensemble was sometimes ragged, enunciation often approximate, and it all seemed like hard work.

The impeccably drilled RSNO Junior Chorus, however, showed they could teach their adult colleagues a thing or two about singing with precision and vitality.

**DAVID KETTLE**

**MUSIC**  
**SANDI THOM**  
KING TUT'S, GLASGOW  
★

SINCE her reinvention as a blues artist, prompting a move to the US and her hooking-up with respected guitar-man hubby Joe Bonamassa, Banff singer-songwriter Sandi Thom cuts a more convincing figure than in her previous life as a featherweight acoustic popstrel – one subject of much scorn equally for taste-amputated music (lone hit *I Wish I Was A Punk Rocker (With Flowers In My Hair)* still stubbornly holds ground in her set) as her ill-advised mixing of pop and politics (Thom once duetted with Alex Salmond).

But while her mettle and staying-power are to be commended, it remains hard to get behind the 31-year-old, whose career continues to be governed by acute out-of-touchness – lengthy guitar-solo-licked 12-bar blues jams and over-earnest rock ballads are, patently, not stuff of



**Valentina Farcas sang the soprano role in *Carmina Burana***