

CLASSICAL

Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Elim Chan, Lukáš Vondráček (piano)

Usher Hall, Edinburgh



A Romeo and Juliet sandwich: that's how the RSNO's principal guest conductor Elim Chan described their Valentine's offering, bookended as it was by two Russian composers' responses to Shakespeare's great romantic tragedy. An excess of passion and schmaltz? Not at all – if anything, contrasting Tchaikovsky's voluptuous “fantasy overture” with selections from Prokofiev's arch, sometimes grotesque Soviet ballet music provided fascinating perspectives on Russia's fascination with the Bard.

It was a shame, then, that Chan didn't always entirely convince. Her Prokofiev movements were vividly characterised but sometimes so brisk as to rob the music of its menace: her strutting Montagues and Capulets, infamous from *The Apprentice's* opening credits,

were a bit too sprightly to be threatening. There was a bristling sense of barely restrained energy to the opening of her Tchaikovsky, but by the churning emotions of its central section, it felt disappointingly matter-of-fact.

In between, Lukáš Vondráček proved a mesmerising soloist in Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No2, his playing so crisp and defined – occasionally rather harshly percussive – that even accompaniment figures stood out against their orchestral melodies. The opening of his scampering third movement sounded so fleet and mercurial that it could almost have been some of Mendelssohn's fairy music. His sometimes volatile switches of mood and direction, however, occasionally left Chan and the orchestra marginally out of sync. In the end, you were so wrapped up in the unpredictable, sometimes mannered minutiae of his playing that you forgot just how transporting this music could be. All round, enjoyable, though less inspirational.

DAVID KETTLE