

MUSIC
RSNO CHRISTMAS
CONCERT

USHER HALL, EDINBURGH

★★★★

NOT so much a Christmas concert, more a novelty hat competition. Reindeer antlers, Christmas cakes and even a plump turkey adorned the heads of the eager RSNO players. But few could match the scarlet kilt,

flashing sporran and ice-white polar bear boots of conductor Christopher Bell.

Yes, the RSNO attacked their annual Christmas party with relish. But if it was a chance for the players to let their hair down – cue spinning basses and dancing trombones – they made sure they took their enthusiastic audience with them.

Despite the celebratory atmosphere, though, there

was no compromising on musical quality. Richard Bissill's *Christmas Carnival* made a dashing opener, setting familiar seasonal tunes in a grandly sweeping Hollywood style – and showcased the orchestra's powerful, colourful playing.

The show's centrepiece – Howard Blake's *The Snowman*, complete with film – had a bit of trouble with sound balance: Libby McArthur's

urgent narration sometimes drowned out the orchestra's more delicate passages. But treble Michael Smith gave a confident, captivating account of the famous *Walking in the Air*, and the orchestra was full of appropriate wonder at Raymond Briggs's tearful tale.

Things went properly wild in the second half, though, with sleigh rides, snowflakes, and carols and songs for audience

and choir. And the RSNO Chorus was on exceptional form, with a rich, beautifully balanced and impeccably enunciated sound – but the RSNO's trombonists probably weren't told they'd end up dancing as penguins in front of the orchestra when they signed their contracts. All great fun, and carried off with generous spirit and a warm heart.

DAVID KETTLE