

MUSIC

SCO: BEATRICE AND BENEDICT

USHER HALL, EDINBURGH

★★★★

IT'S become a bit of a Robin Ticciati tradition to kick off the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's season with an opera. Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict* might not be the first operatic work to spring to many people's minds – it's a concise, light-hearted rethink of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* with all the serious stuff taken out. But it drew a crowd nonetheless – and, more importantly, it played to the SCO's strengths under principal conductor Ticciati: lightness, transparency, precision and inner power.

And, indeed, to Ticciati's feel for Berlioz's distinctively lyrical brand of Romanticism. There was a gentle sparkle to the amiable *Overture* as it bounced along under Ticciati's

encouraging direction, and he had a remarkable ear for the striking detail of Berlioz's good-natured score – a gentle scurry from the strings here, a sudden blaze of trumpets there, all put to good dramatic effect.

It was a good idea to use English surtitles to translate the French text, but without the spoken dialogue to connect them, the vocal numbers struggled to carry the story. They were helped, though, by vivid vocal performances.

Kenneth Tarver and Karen Cargill were ideally matched as the reluctant lovers, their light, bright voices and shapely phrasing grabbing attention. But Sally Matthews and Kathleen Wilkinson stole the show with the breathtakingly beautiful *Vous Soupirez, Madame?*, their blended voices etched against the shadowy tapestry of sound that Ticciati conjured from the band. Just exquisite.

DAVID KETTLE