

# Reviews

## MUSIC

### The SCO, The Sixteen & Harry Christophers



Queen's Hall, Edinburgh

It was a gratifyingly packed Queen's Hall – and an expectant one – that had turned out to greet the Scottish unveiling of one of James MacMillan's newest works. His hour-long *Stabat Mater* was premiered in London last October by crack choral group The Sixteen under Harry Christophers, and in the months since, this searingly intense, sometimes harrowing piece has clearly seeped into the singers' souls – their Edinburgh performance, joined by the strings of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, was thoughtful, assured, and often overwhelming in its power.

In its grief, fury and compassion, the ancient text – on Mary as she watches her son Christ on the cross – is a perfect fit for MacMillan's visceral music, and in his pre-concert talk he admitted he'd been circling the subject for decades in other Passion-themed works. Those years of contemplation

showed, though, in a setting that treated its subject almost as expressionist drama, yet whose eloquent form – with memories and premonitions of music past or yet to come – stressed the universality of its message. From the resplendent choral harmonies that opened the third movement – only to return in drained resignation to close it – to the meek closing *Amens*, MacMillan's *Stabat Mater* is a masterpiece of choral invention, at times almost ecstatic in its sorrow, and it's hard to imagine a more compelling, convincing account than this.

By way of complete contract, before the interval MacMillan himself conducted the SCO in his orchestral showpiece *Tryst* from way back in 1989 – just as mesmerising in its swaggering, audacious confidence.

**DAVID KETTLE**

## DANCE

### Northern Ballet: *Casanova*



Festival Theatre, Edinburgh

There is a moment in Kenneth Tindall's impressive bio-