

stunning dynamic range, equal to this emotional rollercoaster of a symphony.

Standing in at the last minute for an indisposed Rudolf Buchbinder, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet gave a bright and breezy interpretation of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.3 in C minor. The balance between soloist and orchestra was spot on, with some elegant woodwind shadowing of the piano in the slow movement and a sensational sounding string section throughout. Bavouzet is an engaging soloist and his lively encore of Beethoven's piano sonata Op 31 No. 3 went down a treat.

There was plenty of action in the opening Leonore Overture No 3, one of several versions Beethoven wrote as a prelude to what became his one and only opera *Fidelio*. The agitated strings and off-stage trumpet establish just the right tone of foreboding for the ensuing prison drama.

SUSAN NICKALLS

MUSIC

SCO: NELSON MASS

QUEEN'S HALL, EDINBURGH

★★★★★

CONDUCTOR Adam Fischer cuts an extraordinary figure. Ambling shyly on to the platform in a badly ironed shirt, he was barely able to look the audience in the eye to acknowledge their applause. But once on the podium, he became a mad thing, leaping and crouching, arms flailing,

furious fists flying, and wielding his baton like a dagger.

Who'd have thought a simple all-Haydn programme could be so overwhelming? Fischer's performance, though, was one of breathtaking intensity and steely control – it grabbed you by the lapels and dared you to look away. And the SCO players responded with searing, high-contrast playing, big on drama, but never lacking beauty nor refinement.

With the performers filling virtually half of the Queen's Hall, there was a thrilling immediacy to the music, too – especially in the opening "*Nelson*" Mass. Fischer's account was urgent and compelling, phrases beautifully sculpted and surging with irrepressible energy, and it felt like the SCO Chorus – impeccably drilled – were singing straight from the heart. Of the four fine soloists, bass-baritone Neal Davies brought a honeyed richness to his passionate solos, and mezzo Clare Wilkinson sang with a touching directness.

Soprano Elizabeth Watts seemed a bit too operatic in the Mass, but she returned for an astonishing performance of Haydn's heart-rending *Scena di Berenice* that almost brought the house down with its seething, spitting fury.

But it was Fischer's night, and even in Haydn's amiable "*Clock*" Symphony he found both turbulence and joyful fun. Exhausting, sometimes shocking in its intensity, it was an evening of glorious revelations.

DAVID KETTLE