



style with Mike Scott, but not his stage presence. On the other hand, Scott probably doesn't own a "transsexual guitar called Lula".

In days of yore, support band Stealing Sheep might have been burned at the stake for their unusual punky pagan approach to female harmony singing; in 2013, their sonic sorcery is to be welcomed for conjuring such a distinctive sound.

FIONA SHEPHERD

MUSIC
SCO: A LITTLE BOOK OF MONSTERS

USHER HALL, EDINBURGH

★★★★

A GAGGLE of monsters invaded Edinburgh's Usher Hall on Saturday afternoon – and not just the 200-odd of the city's primary-school children in the venue's choir seats.

These were imaginary fiends, conjured in listeners' minds by poet Matt Harvey and composer Stephen Deazley in their highly effective choral song cycle *A Little Book of Monsters*, the centrepiece of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's deliciously macabre family concert.

Deazley's vivid music ranged in style from Prokofiev to swing and funk, and the twisted tales that Harvey slipped into verse were gleefully dark.

But it was the children's choir who made the concert, impeccably drilled by their teachers and Deazley himself. Singing from memory and with ringing clarity, they could have taught many of their adult counterparts a thing or two as they merrily sang their stories

of man-eating changing cubicles and cannibal creatures.

The SCO players, too, were on fine form under James Lowe's precise if sometimes workaday direction, rising to Deazley's intricate lines and wide-ranging styles with relish. The piece could probably have done with one or two fewer numbers, but the audience was nonetheless rapt throughout.

Following monster-related activities from the SCO throughout the Usher Hall earlier in the day, the concert had opened with an engaging *Peer Gynt Suite* by Grieg. The stentorian tones of cellist, actor and baritone Matthew Sharp provided a stirring commentary throughout the afternoon, and he proved an incisive narrator in Paul Patterson's sparkling if slightly overlong musical retelling of *The Three Little Pigs*.

DAVID KETTLE

MUSIC
IRANIAN FESTIVAL GRAND CONCERT

STUDIO 24, EDINBURGH

★★★

EDINBURGH'S favourite alternative rock club venue may have seemed an unlikely setting for a centrepiece event of this year's third Edinburgh Iranian Festival, but an interior draped in Persian textiles transformed it into a welcoming Aladdin's cave. Our garrulous host was the Irish/Iranian comedian Patrick Monahan, who introduced a diverse selection of traditional and contemporary music, from the all-acoustic Parvaz Ensemble and Baran Music Group to the pounding Persian/fusion dance beats of DJ Barfi.

The former two acts, the first specialising in Kurdish sounds, the second incorporating Indian and western elements, featured a variety of Iranian instruments, including tanbour, the Middle Eastern long-necked lute; the zither-like qanun; kamancheh – a round-bodied fiddle played like a miniature cello – and a variety of hand percussion, with the Baran group also adding saxophone, congas and Indian ney flute. Together with strong, soulful vocals, the music's metallic tonalities and sultry *maqam* modes conjured a variety of moods – devotion, celebration, longing, ceremony, belligerence – enhanced by impressive instrumental solos. The near-total absence of any explanation, however, made it difficult – for the non-Iranian half of the audience – to engage beyond this basic level: a salient omission for a festival that "hopes to introduce Scotland to the heart and soul of Iran".

The night's third live act, the Ali Azimi Band, were a different puzzle, an odd hybrid of electric guitar-based western rock'n'pop with Iranian vocals, though their frontman proved a powerfully compelling singer.

SUE WILSON