

dered in from the wrong decade.

The second half was given over to meatier sets by Nik Kershaw, Marc Almond, Tony Hadley and ABC's Martin Fry, all to a greater or lesser degree attempting to graft a slick muso-seriousness on to a night of frivolous nostalgia. Each were in fine voice with songs to spare, yet Hadley and eventually Fry's sets felt flabby and indulgent. Kershaw was businesslike but effective in bringing a rockier edge to proceedings but it was Almond who stole the night with the sheer quality of his solo and Soft Cell catalogue.

**FIONA SHEPHERD**

## MUSIC

### Scottish Ensemble: For a Winter's Night

Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh

★★★★★

THE problem with a candlelit concert is that it's hard to read the programme. But in the Scottish Ensemble's wonderfully eclectic, ten-pieces-per-half, iPod-on-shuffle-style seasonal concert, not knowing



◀ The Scottish Ensemble gave us an eye-opening, expertly constructed festive musical treat

what was coming next felt like precisely the point.

Artistic Director Jonathan Morton cunningly ran pieces into each other, inventing subtle segues or prolonging figurations to link an Indian raga (played with wonderfully oily suppleness by Daniel Pioro), a Tchaikovsky waltz, a bit of Vivaldi's Winter and an ancient Shetland tune (given a radiantly ringing account by Alastair Savage), among many other styles and approaches. In fact, "shuffle" is doing Morton's curating a disservice: this was an expertly constructed concert, with themes returning in fresh contexts, old and

new colliding to eyebrow-raising effect, and plenty of opportunities for soloists to do their thing (Morton himself delivered a splendid slow movement from Vivaldi's Winter, entirely on icy harmonics).

It was as much a celebration of the Scottish Ensemble's own 50th anniversary, with plenty of nods to their bulging back catalogue, as it was a festive musical treat. The players were on full-blooded, enthusiastic form whatever the style, and closed each half – provocatively – with a longer contemporary work. Before the interval, John Tavener's almost unbearably sweet Tears of the Angels got all the time and space it needed to hit its target, and to close, the jagged lines and dense counterpoint of Erkki-Sven Tüür's *Insula deserta* sent listeners off into the night with plenty to think about. An inspirational evening, full of wonder.

**DAVID KETTLE**

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