

**MUSIC**  
**SCOTTISH ENSEMBLE**

ROYAL CONSERVATOIRE OF  
SCOTLAND, GLASGOW

★★★★

IT FELT a bit like slowly imbibing a bottle of fine vintage claret during a rich, indulgent lunch. Yes, combining the opulent sounds of three equally sumptuous (and fairly similar) late-Romantic string works – Webern's *Langsamer Satz* and Richard Strauss's *Capriccio Prelude* and *Metamorphosen* – in a single hour-long lunchtime recital might have seemed too much of a good thing. But the Scottish Ensemble – in a seven-strong chamber incarnation – pulled it off magnificently.

And it was all down to quite a measured emotional honesty. That's not to say their playing was cool – they conveyed the shifting moods of the *Capriccio Prelude* with remarkable passion, expertly navigating

Strauss's fluid harmonies. But they never wallowed, even in the temptingly angst-filled depths of *Metamorphosen*. Here, they conveyed the composer's pain with touching sincerity, and a clear intention behind every phrase gave the music a ringing sense of purpose. If they took a little while to warm up to the opening *Webern Langsamer Satz*, by the veiled ending they were exquisite.

And it felt very much like an ensemble of soloists: Scottish Ensemble leader Jonathan Morton directed with a lightness of touch and some bright, energetic playing; violist Andrew Berridge had some beautifully turned moments in the spotlight; and lone bassist Diane Clark made every note count. It was just a shame that a mix-up over the programme order left some listeners a bit confused about what they were actually hearing.

**DAVID KETTLE**