

MUSIC

Steven Osborne

Queen's Hall



"After all, you didn't pay to hear me," quipped Steven Osborne modestly as he introduced his Queen's Hall recital. He was right: the Edinburgh pianist was a very last-minute stand-in for an indisposed Beatrice Rana, and offered very different repertoire, too. Nobody in the audience had chosen to hear Osborne's programme of visionary Schubert and Messiaen – but then an unexpected encounter can, as in this case, be unforgettable.

Osborne began with Schubert's valedictory final Sonata, D960, and virtually caressed the first two movements into being. There was all of the otherworldliness you might expect from Schubert's epic utterance, but shot through with definition and clarity. The closing to Osborne's slow movement might have felt like it was slipping slowly from consciousness, but



↑ Osborne: Clarity and power

he topped it with a scherzo and finale that bristled with muscularity.

His Messiaen – five carefully selected movements from *Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus* – was simply astonishing, and he needn't have worried about an exodus at the interval. From an intensely still 'Regard du Père' to a blazing 'Regard des anges', it shone a brilliant light on Osborne's remarkable power, precision and poetry, ending in a euphoric 'Regard de l'esprit de joie' that seemed to strain at the capabilities of his instrument. Breathtaking stuff.

DAVID KETTLE