

MUSIC
BBC SSO/
STEPHEN OSBORNE

CITY HALLS, GLASGOW

★★★★

SCOTTISH pianist Steven Osborne chose the soft-edged, lyrical Fourth to launch his cycle of Beethoven piano concertos with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. And, if the lucid, beautifully articulated account he gave is anything to go by, it's set to be a remarkable series.

With Andrew Manze drawing supplé playing from the BBC SSO musicians, Osborne kept a strong sense of line throughout the tricky, often introspective first movement, and sparkled in the effervescent finale. Most remarkable, though, was the high-contrast slow movement, where Osborne's serene, hymn-like chords gradually calmed the jagged, clipped phrases that Manze summoned from the strings. It was as if Osborne's every gesture was carefully weighed and considered, yet

never lacked spontaneity or freshness.

Manze concluded the programme with Vaughan Williams' "Pastoral" Symphony, never an easy piece to pull off since, in its composer's words, it is "in four movements, all of them slow". There's no getting away from the symphony's air of melancholy – it was, after all, inspired by the composer's experiences serving during the First World War, rather than any English bucolic idylls.

But with his fluid conducting, Manze's account was rich and rewarding right from the start. He wasn't afraid to let this expansive music breathe, yet he subtly pushed it on with clarity and determination, unleashing power at times but never losing sight of the music's sense of vulnerability. Trumpet and horn soloists shone in evocative solos, and soprano Ruby Hughes's wordless rhapsody brought the evening to a fittingly transcendental conclusion.

DAVID KETTLE